

Family Medicine Clerkship

Plain Language Summary Template

Title: Medication options to help with depression

Name: Christopher Anderson, MS3

Plain Language Summary:

Depression is a disease that affects about 15 million adults in the United States. Signs of depression can include feeling sad, crying, trouble sleeping, sleeping too much, feeling tired, poor appetite, eating too much, trouble focusing, feeling guilty, moving or talking slowly, or wanting to hurt yourself. You should see your doctor if you think you might have depression. You should call a doctor you think you might hurt yourself.

There are many ways to try to help people with depression. Some people feel better just from changes such as exercising more or eating healthy. Others might do better just by talking about their problems with a counselor. Other people are helped by taking pills that help with depression. These are called antidepressants.

There are many different antidepressants out there. Some people do better with some, and other people do better with others. These pills fall into different classes. Two of these classes are SSRI's and SNRI's. These two classes are related and very similar, but in some ways are different.

Some people have a hard time getting rid of their depression even after trying pills. They might try a few different antidepressants or even try using more than one antidepressant at the same time without any help. In the past, doctors have not tried using an SSRI and an SNRI very much for treating depression. Some feel that using these two at the same time might help some people who are having a hard time getting rid of their depression. There have been some people who have it does seem to be the only way to help them with depression.

Since these two classes work in similar ways, there may be risks to using them at the same time. They both work by changing the amount of a natural chemical in your body, called serotonin. If they are both being used together, it is possible that they could cause the body to have more serotonin than you wanted. This is called Serotonin Syndrome, and can be very dangerous and serious. It could cause fast heart beat, diarrhea, fever, sweating, vomiting, or changes in blood pressure. It can also cause dangerous muscle problems, that if ignored could be deadly. It is important to call a doctor right away if you think you are having this problem. Since this is a worry, more scientific research looking at using SSRI's and SNRI's at the same time may need to be done.

Additional Resources:

Information on Serotonin Syndrome:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0004531/>

Information on Depression:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0003697/>

Key Words:

Depression
Antidepressant
Serotonin syndrome

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Family Medicine Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up-to-date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.