

Partial Response to Antidepressant Therapy and Residual Symptoms of Major Depressive Disorder (MDD)

What Are Residual Symptoms?

If you have started taking an antidepressant medication for major depressive disorder (MDD) and are still experiencing depressive symptoms, you're not alone. The goal of managing MDD is to help reduce depressive symptoms,¹ but about half of MDD patients who receive their first antidepressant treatment may find that it does not adequately help.² If this happens, you might still have lingering symptoms of depression, also known as **residual depressive symptoms**.³



Figure 1. Residual depressive symptoms may linger after starting initial antidepressant therapy.

How Long Does It Take My Antidepressant to Work?

It can take time for an antidepressant treatment to show that it is working, and timing also may vary from person to person.¹ About 4 to 8 weeks after starting your treatment, your doctor or mental healthcare provider will evaluate how well you are responding to the treatment you have been receiving.¹

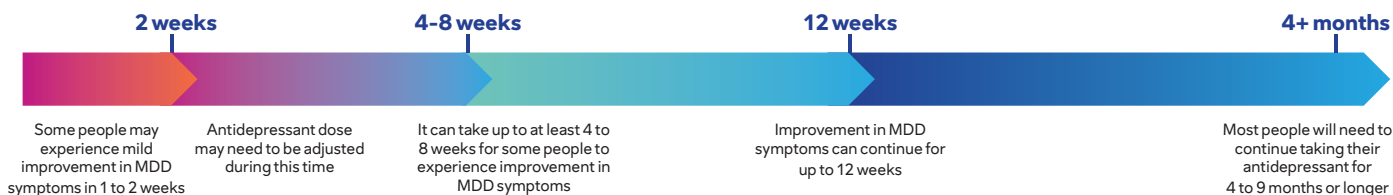


Figure 2. American Psychiatric Association. *Practice Guideline for the Treatment of Patients With Major Depressive Disorder*. 3rd ed. 2010.

So, if you have recently started an antidepressant and still feel depressed, don't be discouraged! It is important to be patient and continue with the treatment as prescribed even if improvements are gradual.¹



Figure 3. American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. 5th ed. 2013.

Why Is It Important to Recognize If You Are Having Residual Symptoms?

Research shows that up to half of patients with depression who have received initial antidepressant treatment can experience residual symptoms.⁴ Residual symptoms of depression may interfere with your day-to-day activities, so it's important to talk to your doctor or mental healthcare provider if you or your caregiver notice that you are experiencing residual symptoms of depression.^{5,6} It may be necessary for you to work with your doctor or mental healthcare provider to see if changes to your management plan are needed.

How Your Doctor or Mental Healthcare Provider Can Help

Throughout the course of your antidepressant therapy, your doctor or mental healthcare provider will work closely with you to try and help you feel better.^{1,6,7}

Your healthcare provider will use tools like questionnaires to assess your symptoms and see if you're responding to treatment.^{8,9} One such questionnaire that your doctor may ask you to fill out is the Patient Health Questionnaire 9 (PHQ-9), which is a 9-item questionnaire that can be used to evaluate your mood over the last 2 weeks.¹⁰

This may be completed at each follow-up visit to track changes in the symptoms of depression that you are experiencing.¹ This is an objective way that may help determine if your treatment is working and whether your symptoms are getting better. Using a mood tracker may also help keep tabs on your progress and ensure that your management plan is helping to improve your symptoms.

If your first antidepressant doesn't help with all of your depression symptoms, your doctor or mental healthcare provider may suggest some changes. These can include changing the dose of your medicine, adjusting the psychotherapy you may be receiving, or adding another medication to the one you are already taking.¹

An example of a tracker for your personal use is available below:



Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) Wellness Tracker¹¹

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Your healthcare provider will also review what may have contributed to you experiencing residual symptoms following your initial MDD treatment.¹

This may include:

- Whether the treatment choice was right for you
- How well the instructions on taking the medication were followed
- Whether the medication dose was appropriate
- Whether the medication was taken for a long enough time
- How the medication was processed by your body
- How well you tolerated the medication
- Confirming if your initial diagnosis was correct
- Other possible health conditions



Figure 4. American Psychiatric Association. *Practice Guideline for the Treatment of Patients With Major Depressive Disorder*. 3rd ed. 2010.

Your doctor or mental healthcare provider will work with you to set up an MDD management plan that is the most appropriate for you. Most importantly, patience is key – give enough time for the plan to work for you.

References

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