

Provider Tips for Improving Medication Adherence in Patients Receiving Antidepressant Therapy*

Reasons for Non-adherence	Strategies to Improve Adherence	Counseling Tips
Lack of knowledge regarding the nature of depression	Discuss epidemiology of depression; refer to depression as a medical condition	21 million Americans suffer from depression every year. Depression is a medical condition, just like asthma and diabetes. It affects your thoughts, feelings, physical health and behavior.
Guilt associated with diagnosis of depression	Discuss the chemical basis for depression	Having depression is not your fault, and there is no reason to feel guilty or ashamed. Depression is no more a sign of weakness than cancer.
Need for reassurance and support	Reinforce that depression is treatable; discuss appropriate duration of treatment	No one knows exactly what causes depression, but it is influenced by biological, genetic and environmental factors. In people with depression, natural chemicals called neurotransmitters -- that allow the brain cells to communicate with one another -- may be out of balance. Medications are available that can correct this imbalance.
Lack of belief in treatment's effectiveness	Discuss efficacy of medications	Antidepressants have been shown to effectively treat depression. The goal of treatment is complete remission. Sometimes you have to try different doses and medications to find out what works best.
Belief that the treatment regimen is too complex	Reinforce that simplified regimens are available	Consider a once-daily administration regimen.
Belief that treatment does not help with other symptoms associated with depression.	Remind patients of the delayed therapeutic effects of antidepressants	With medication, you may start to feel better in two to four weeks, but because everyone is different, it may take longer.
Fear of medication's adverse effects	Reinforce that most patients do not have to stop therapy because of adverse effects.	Some people may have no adverse effects while taking antidepressants.
Belief that adverse effects will make it difficult to tolerate therapy	Review most common adverse effects; reassure patient that, over time, adverse effects should be less of a problem	Common adverse effects include dry mouth, indigestion or mild stomach upset, diarrhea, or trouble sleeping. Sometimes, antidepressant therapy may cause patients to lose interest in sex. Mild side effects are common and usually improve with time.
Patient feels better.	Explain the process of treatment. Medications are taken after symptom remission to prevent relapse of symptoms and recurrence of depression.	Continue antidepressants even after you feel better. To effectively treat depression, six months or more of antidepressant therapy may be needed. If you are thinking about stopping medication, call me first.

*Adapted from Bucci KK, Possidente CJ and Talbot KA (2003). Strategies to improve medication adherence in patients with depression. *Am J Health-Syst Pharm*, 60: 2601-5.