

Serotonin Syndrome

(Information for Adults and Older Adolescents)


A rare, but potentially serious complication of antidepressant treatment

Serotonin syndrome is a rare, but potentially serious condition caused by an increase in serotonin, a chemical naturally found in all our bodies. This condition may be brought on by the use of medicines that increase levels of serotonin in the brain, which include several types of antidepressants.

Of these, SSRI antidepressants are most commonly prescribed, and include: citalopram, escitalopram, fluoxetine, paroxetine and sertraline. Other antidepressants implicated are the SNRI antidepressants, venlafaxine and duloxetine and the antidepressant vortioxetine.

Other substances that may contribute include: 5-hydroxytryptophan (5HTP), cocaine, lithium, ecstasy, amphetamines, LSD, St John's Wort and opioid pain killers, e.g. codeine and tramadol.

Symptoms vary in type and severity and usually occur within hours of taking the medicine.

- Increasing Severity
- 
- Diarrhoea
 - Restlessness
 - Profuse sweating
 - Tremor (including fine shaking of the hands)
 - Shivering
 - Involuntary muscle twitches or jerking
 - Mental confusion and mental state changes
 - Raised blood pressure and faster pulse (heart rate)
 - Increased body temperature
 - Seizures or convulsions (fits)

The milder symptoms at the top of the list, including diarrhoea and restlessness, may go unnoticed, but if you experience these symptoms and if they persist, you should inform me or your GP, as a further increase in dose may lead to more severe symptoms. If you develop any of the more severe symptoms, including involuntary muscle twitching, mental confusion, increased body temperature or seizures, or several of the milder symptoms all at the same time, **then you should immediately go to the nearest hospital's Accident and Emergency Department for an urgent assessment.**

If you require this document in an alternative format, i.e. easy read, large text, audio, Braille or a community language please contact the pharmacy team on 01243 623349 (Text Relay calls welcome).

Take this sheet with you, or if you forget, make sure you tell the doctors there what medication you are taking. If confirmed as serotonin syndrome, the antidepressant (and any other medication that might be contributing to the problem) will be stopped and supportive care to control symptoms used. The use of another medicine to reverse the effects may also be needed. This is a rare condition and symptoms are generally mild. It is usually due to more than one serotonergic medicine or illicit substance being taken together.

This is extremely unlikely to affect you but it is important that you are aware of it. If you are concerned over the next few days or weeks about your reaction to this medicine, do contact me, or your GP, to discuss it.

My contact details are:

Other side effects are detailed in the accompanying patient information leaflet.

More information about the side effects of antidepressants, including serotonin syndrome, is available on the following website:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/antidepressants/side-effects/>

Originally published April 2009

Reviewed unchanged in July 2012 and September 2015.

Updated May 2016

Updated July 2020

Next review due: Jul 2024