



## SSRIs and SNRIs

BQIS Fact Sheets provide a general overview on topics important to supporting an individual's health and safety and to improving their quality of life. This document provides general information on the topic and is not intended to replace team assessment, decision-making, or medical advice. This is the fifth of ten Fact Sheets regarding psychotropic medications.

### Intended Outcomes

Individuals will understand why selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) or serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs) are prescribed, how they work, the range and severity of side effects, and how the physician monitors this medicine.

### Definitions

**Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs):** A class of medications that affect the activity of serotonin.

**Serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs):** A class of medications that affect the activity of serotonin and norepinephrine.

**Serotonin:** A hormone found in various locations of the body including the brain, which acts both as a chemical messenger that transmits nerve signals between nerve cells and causes blood vessels to narrow.

**Norepinephrine:** A chemical responsible for moving nerve impulses between neurons. It also acts as a stress hormone and plays a role in an individual's fight-or-flight response. In this role, it increases the individual's heart rate and blood flow to the muscles; it also stimulates the release of blood sugar and is often compared to adrenaline.

### Facts

- SSRIs and SNRIs medications include: fluoxetine (Prozac), sertraline (Zoloft) paroxetine (Paxil), fluvoxamine (Luvox), escitalopram (Lexapro), citalopram (Celexa), duloxetine (Cymbalta), venlafaxine (Effexor), desvenlafaxine (Pristiq)
- Depending on the medication, SSRIs and SNRIs are available in:
  - Liquid
  - Tablets



- These medicines work by decreasing:
  - Mood swings
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
- Common side effects include (may decrease after several weeks):
  - Weight gain or weight loss
  - Upset stomach, nausea, vomiting
  - Diarrhea
  - Headaches
  - Anxiety/agitation/restlessness or nervousness
  - Tremors
  - Sedation/drowsiness
  - Insomnia/trouble sleeping
  - Dizziness
  - Increased sweating
  - Difficulty with sexual functioning
- Occasional side effects (call the physician within several weeks):
  - Frequent yawning
  - Blurred vision
  - Tiredness/fatigue

Occasional but serious side effects (call the physician that day):

- New or increased suicidal thoughts
- Less need for sleep, talking fast, feeling very excited or irritable
- Raised blood pressure or heart rate

Very rare but extremely serious side effects (go to the emergency room immediately):

- Seizures
- Restlessness with confusion, shaking or jerking, sweating or the skin turning red



- How the physician monitors these medicines:
  - Checking for a past history or family history of mania
  - Checking pulse rate and blood pressure at each visit

### **Recommended Actions and Prevention Strategies**

1. Give medications as prescribed.
2. Watch for anything different/a change in status of the individual and for signs and symptoms of medication side effects.
3. Write down any noted signs and symptoms of medication side effects and changes in status of the individual.
4. Tell your supervisor or nurse about any noted signs and symptoms of medication side effects or changes in status of the individual immediately.
5. Seek medical attention as indicated according to the seriousness of symptoms as listed above.
6. Watch for effectiveness of medication by writing down target behavior data that relates to diagnosis.



### Learning Assessment

The following questions can be used to verify a person's competency regarding the material contained in this Fact Sheet:

1. SSRIs and SNRIs are used to decrease:
  - A. Depression
  - B. Anxiety
  - C. Mood swings
  - D. All of the above
2. Common side effects of SSRIs/SNRIs include:
  - A. Headaches
  - B. Muscle twitching
  - C. Seizures
  - D. Hair Loss
3. Occasional side effects of SSRIs/SNRIs include:
  - A. Blurred vision
  - B. Confusion
  - C. Trouble speaking
  - D. Nausea
4. Serious side effects of SSRIs/SNRIs include:
  - A. Suicidal thoughts
  - B. Irritability
  - C. Bed-wetting
  - D. Hair loss



### References

Ferguson, J. M. (2001). SSRI Antidepressant Medications: Adverse Effects and Tolerability. Primary Care Companion to the Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, 3 (1), 22–27. Retrieved 08/01/2015 from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC181155/>.

Mayo Clinic. Serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs). Retrieved 08/01/2015 from <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/in-depth/antidepressants/art-20044970>.

Mayo Clinic. Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). Retrieved 08/01/2015 from <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/in-depth/ssris/art-20044825?pg=1>.

### Related Resources

Psychiatric Medication Series Fact Sheets: “Atypical Antipsychotics”, “Typical Antipsychotics”, “Depakote”, “Lithium”, and “Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome”

### Learning Assessment Answers

1. D
2. A
3. A
4. A