



# WITHDRAWAL EFFECTS OF PSYCHIATRIC DRUGS

Many people who have taken psychiatric drugs have found that the withdrawal effects of these drugs can persist for months, even years after they stop taking them. Patients are frequently not warned about this, and are often told that it is simply symptoms of their 'mental disorder' returning – yet studies confirm that after patient's stop taking certain psychiatric drugs, the withdrawal effects may last several months to years afterwards.

**It is extremely important that no one stops taking any psychiatric drug without the advice and assistance of a competent medical doctor. Patients, family members and others are too often not warned about this at time of prescribing.**



## PSYCHIATRIC DRUG WITHDRAWAL EFFECTS CAN LAST YEARS

Withdrawal effects can be worsening of existing symptoms or new not previously experienced symptoms. They can occur when someone stops a psychiatric drug, decreases the dose or switches from one psychiatric drug to another.

The Council for Evidence-based Psychiatry in the United Kingdom determined: "Withdrawal from psychiatric drugs can be disabling and can cause a range of severe physical and psychological effects which often last for months and sometimes years. ..."

British psychiatrist Joanna Moncrieff and others reported in the *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*: "It is now accepted that all major classes of psychiatric medication produce distinctive withdrawal effects which mostly reflect their pharmacological activity." Further the researchers reported, "Just like the various substances that are used recreationally, each type of psychiatric medication induces a distinctive altered mental and physical state. ..."

**Antidepressants:** The journal *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics* published a report concerning persistent post-withdrawal effects which began six weeks after cessation of taking SSRI antidepressants (a class of antidepressants). Researchers reviewed self-reported adverse events between February and September 2010 and found **post-withdrawal symptoms "may last several months to years."** Symptoms included disturbed mood, persistent insomnia, irritability, depression, impaired concentration and memory, poor stress tolerance and emotional liability (exaggerated mood changes with strong emotions or feeling such as uncontrollable crying or laughing or heightened irritability or temper).



**Antipsychotics:** An Australian literature review of antipsychotic discontinuation effects found that withdrawal effects for antipsychotics include: Vomiting, nausea/and or diarrhoea, difficulty sleeping, restlessness, anxiety, and/or agitation, dizziness, problems with muscle movement including involuntary muscle contractions, inability to stay still and/or uncontrollable movements.

**Benzodiazepines:** Are tranquillisers such as Valium, Serepax, Normison and Mogadon. Australia's drug regulatory agency's Product Information used by doctors to prescribe, lists the following as withdrawal effects for alprazolam a very common benzodiazepine also commonly known as Xanax: Insomnia, anxiety, vomiting, tremor, muscle and abdominal cramps, delusional beliefs, heart palpitations, loss of short term memory, convulsions and psychosis.

The Western Australian Department of Health advises people taking benzodiazepines that they can easily become addicted, and when they stop taking them, they will experience withdrawal symptoms. They also advise, "Abrupt withdrawal symptoms can last from weeks to months" and it is dangerous to suddenly stop.

## AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT PSYCHIATRIC DRUG WARNINGS FOR WITHDRAWAL EFFECTS

Government drug regulatory agencies from around the world, including Australia's Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) have issued psychiatric drug warnings to warn of withdrawal effects.

Australian warnings for withdrawal effects include:

- **2018 June:** The TGA issued a Medicine Safety Update to remind prescribers of psychiatric drugs of the importance of educating patients and their carers about discontinuing, discontinuing symptoms and not suddenly stopping a psychiatric drug, especially when taking an antidepressant. This also includes the "ADHD" drug atomoxetine (Strattera, an antidepressant) and the antidepressant Zyban used in smoking cessation.
- **2016 December:** The TGA warned that antidepressants should never be stopped suddenly and should be reduced gradually to avoid potential discontinuation symptoms such as nausea, sleep problems, dizziness, irritability, anxiety, numbness and "electric shock-like" symptoms. The TGA advised that it is important for carers and patients to be educated about this.
- **2011 November:** The TGA issued a Safety Advisory to warn that suddenly stopping citalopram (Cipramil, Celepram, Talum, Citobell, Celica and others with "citalopram" in their name) can cause withdrawal symptoms including anxiety, insomnia, emotional instability, headache, diarrhoea, vomiting and heart palpitations.
- **2011 August:** The TGA issued a warning that newborn infants exposed to antipsychotics during the third trimester of pregnancy may be at risk of withdrawal syndrome at birth.
- **2005 August:** The TGA issued a warning that SSRIs (class of antidepressant) are not registered for use in children under 18 for depression and that SSRIs had been linked to new onset suicidality (suicidal thoughts and behaviour) in both adults and children. "Similar symptoms can follow withdrawal of the SSRI," the TGA stated.
- **2005 September:** Suddenly stopping the antidepressant paroxetine (Aropax, Oxetine, Paxtine, Loxamine and other brand names) can cause withdrawal effects that can be severe or life-threatening, the TGA warned in an information sheet to health professionals.
- **2003 August:** The TGA warned that SSRI antidepressant use during pregnancy and breast feeding can cause withdrawal effects in the baby such as agitation, jitteriness, poor feeding, gastrointestinal symptoms and hypotonia (deficient muscle tone or tension). In adults, withdrawal effects can occur as with other SSRIs.



To read a fact sheet with all the Australian psychiatric drug warnings log onto [cchr.org.au](http://cchr.org.au)

## WITHDRAWAL EFFECTS REPORTED TO AUSTRALIA'S DRUG REGULATORY AGENCY

As of 3 January 2019, the Therapeutic Goods Administration had received 938 reports of withdrawal syndrome for antidepressants and a further 165 reports of withdrawal syndrome for antipsychotics. Consumers are often not aware they can report side effects and as experts say that only between 1 and 10% of side effects are reported, the number can only be much higher.

To report an adverse drug reaction to the TGA: **On-line, log onto:** <https://www.ebs.tga.gov.au/ebs/ADRS/ADRSRepo.nsf> **Phone to report to a pharmacist:** 1300 134 237; or to speak to the TGA: 1800 020 653

Please log onto [cchr.org.au](http://cchr.org.au) to see the references for above information

## CCHR CONTACT DETAILS:



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CCHR was established by the Church of Scientology and Professor of Psychiatry the late Dr Thomas Szasz in 1969 to investigate and expose psychiatric violations of human rights.