

# Antidepressants and their Role in Suicide Prevention among Individuals with Depression

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## DESCRIPTION

Suicide remains a significant global public health issue, with depression being one of the leading risk factors. The relationship between depression and suicide is well-documented and understanding how treatments, particularly antidepressants, can reduce the risk of suicide in depressed individuals is important. Antidepressants have long been a foundation of treatment for Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) and other mood disorders. While these medications are effective in treating the symptoms of depression, their role in suicide prevention is complex and requires careful consideration. This study examines the role of antidepressants in suicide prevention, focusing on how they impact individuals with depression, the potential risks and the importance of proper medical management.

### The role of antidepressants in treating depression

Antidepressants are a class of medications primarily used to treat depressive disorders, anxiety disorders and certain other mood disorders. The main classes of antidepressants include:

**Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs):** These are the most commonly prescribed antidepressants. They work by increasing the availability of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that regulates mood, by inhibiting its reuptake in the brain.

**Serotonin Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors (SNRIs):** These medications increase the levels of both serotonin and norepinephrine, another neurotransmitter involved in mood regulation.

**Tricyclic Antidepressants (TCAs):** These older medications are effective but tend to have more side effects compared to SSRIs and SNRIs.

**Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors (MAOIs):** Another older class of antidepressants that works by inhibiting the enzyme monoamine oxidase, which breaks down neurotransmitters like serotonin, norepinephrine and dopamine.

**Atypical antidepressants:** These include various medications that do not fall into the other categories but work in different ways to alleviate depressive symptoms.

### Antidepressants and suicide risk

While antidepressants can reduce the risk of suicide by treating depressive symptoms, their relationship with suicidal behavior is multifaceted and warrants careful attention.

**Initial risk of increased suicidal thoughts:** One of the most critical issues in using antidepressants, especially in adolescents and young adults, is the potential for an initial increase in suicidal thoughts or behaviors after starting medication.

The reason for this increase is not entirely clear. Some experts believe that as antidepressants begin to work, they may initially provide individuals with enough energy to act on suicidal thoughts that were previously too overwhelming to act upon. Additionally, people may experience a temporary worsening of symptoms, such as anxiety or agitation, which can contribute to suicidal ideation.

However, it's important to note that these effects are most commonly observed in younger patients. The benefits of antidepressants generally outweigh the risks when the medication is carefully managed and monitored by healthcare providers. In older adults, for instance, antidepressants are generally effective in reducing suicidal risk by treating depression more effectively, especially when combined with psychotherapy.

**Long-term suicide prevention:** The long-term use of antidepressants in individuals with depression has been shown to reduce the risk of suicide. By effectively managing the symptoms of depression, antidepressants help restore emotional stability, reduce feelings of hopelessness and improve overall quality of life. These improvements reduce the likelihood of individuals engaging in self-harm or suicidal behavior.

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## CONCLUSION

Antidepressants are a foundation of treatment for individuals with depression and play a significant role in suicide prevention. By alleviating the symptoms of depression, these medications can reduce feelings of hopelessness, improve mood and help individuals regain control of their lives. However, antidepressants must be carefully prescribed and monitored, particularly during the early stages of treatment, to avoid the potential risk of increased suicidal thoughts.

When used appropriately, antidepressants not only improve the mental health and quality of life for those with depression but also significantly reduce the risk of suicide. The best outcomes are often achieved when antidepressants are combined with psychotherapy, creating a comprehensive approach to treating depression and preventing suicidal behavior. Mental health professionals must work closely with patients, families and caregivers to ensure that antidepressants are used safely and effectively as part of a broader strategy to combat depression and reduce the risk of suicide.