

## ANTIDEPRESSANTS

People who have a chronic pain problem very frequently develop depression. You have been prescribed an antidepressant to help treat the depression associated with your chronic pain. Be advised, however, that antidepressants do not cure the depression that is associated with chronic pain. Antidepressants are still indicated because they help improve your ability to engage with coworkers, family members, and friends. They help you to function better in your job or in your home life. They may help you to sleep better. And, they may help you to feel better in a number of other ways.

However, sometimes antidepressants can actually cause depression or make depression worse. If you believe that your depression is getting worse while taking an antidepressant, tell me. If another physician prescribed your antidepressant, tell your prescribing physician.

There are many ways that antidepressants can actually cause depression or make depression worse. Many antidepressants have weight gain as an unfortunate side effect. Although the mechanisms for weight gain are not fully known, as you gain weight you will feel worse. You will notice yourself getting bigger, your clothes will not fit the same, and some of the other medications that you may have been on at stable doses for a long time may become less effective. This can cause worsening of your depression.

Swelling is also a frequent side effect of antidepressants. As you develop swelling your peripheral nerves become more irritable and your pain increases just on the basis of swelling. As your pain increases you will feel worse and your depression may get worse.

Another insidious but very damaging side effect is loss of libido. This is your desire for sex. This side effect develops very slowly over many months. The person taking the antidepressant is sometimes totally unaware that they have lost their desire for sex except that their frequency of sexual encounters begins to decline. The declining sexual desire can put a serious strain on your relationship with your spouse or significant other.

The person with the declining libido is not the one that complains about it. It is the spouse or partner that complains. If your spouse begins to make comments about your declining sexual desire, be sure to tell me. Even though your interest in sex may be declining, and you do not perceive sexual frustration, you may still experience worsening depression as a result. Do not assume that your declining desire for sex is a result of your chronic pain. Although chronic pain is frequently a reason for avoiding a sexual encounter, the loss of interest in sex is more likely a medication side effect.

Antidepressants may help depression improve or may make depression worse. As your physician, I am trying to improve your overall condition. If you believe that I have prescribed medications that are making you feel worse, talk to me about it.