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MEDICATION HOW-TO

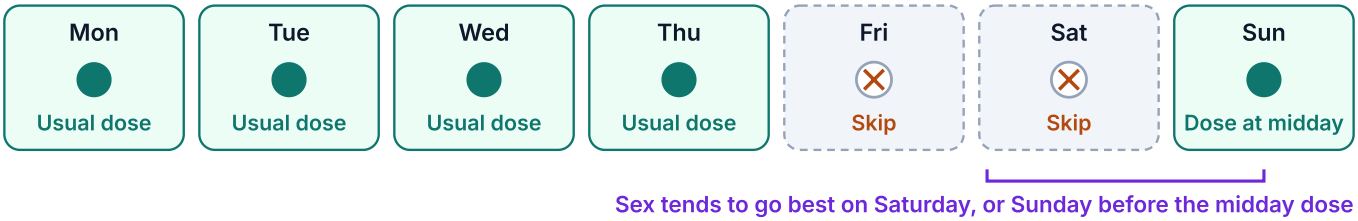
A Medication Holiday for Sexual Side Effects

A planned two-day break from your antidepressant

For people whose prescriber has agreed to a planned short break from an antidepressant for sexual side effects: who it suits, how to do it, and when to stop.

Some antidepressants, mostly **SSRIs** (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors such as sertraline, paroxetine, citalopram and escitalopram), cause sexual side effects. A **medication holiday** means skipping your antidepressant for about two days a week, in a planned way, so sex can fall when the level in your blood is lowest. In the first study, about half of people on sertraline or paroxetine had better sex on holiday weekends, and most stayed well; two later small, unblinded trials found the same. It does not work with fluoxetine (Prozac), which stays in the body for weeks. **Do it only if your prescriber agrees, and only the way they plan.**

THE MOST-STUDIED PLAN



The most-studied plan, for a morning dose. Your prescriber may set different days, a shorter break, or a different plan for an evening dose.

IT MAY SUIT YOU IF

- Your mood or anxiety has been steady for several months.
- You take sertraline, citalopram or escitalopram.
- Sex mostly happens on days you can plan ahead.
- You can stick to a plan exactly and restart on time.

IT IS NOT FOR YOU IF

- You take fluoxetine (Prozac) or vortioxetine (Trintellix): they stay in the body too long for a short break to help.
- Your symptoms are not yet under control, or came back the last time you missed doses.
- You take paroxetine (Paxil) or an SNRI such as venlafaxine or duloxetine, which often cause withdrawal when doses are skipped, or missing a dose has given you bad withdrawal before.

HOW TO DO IT

1. **Plan it with your prescriber.** Agree on the days, how many weekends to try, and what to do if you feel unwell. Write the plan on page 2.
2. **Skip only the planned doses.** The most-studied plan: take your usual dose on Thursday morning, skip Friday and Saturday, and restart on Sunday at midday. Your prescriber may change the days.
3. **Restart on time, at your usual dose.** Never take extra to "catch up." On Monday, go back to your usual time.
4. **Watch for withdrawal.** Dizziness, irritability, nausea, flu-like feelings, poor sleep or brief electric "zaps" mean the break is too long for you. Take your dose, do not drive while dizzy, and tell your prescriber.
5. **Watch your mood.** If low mood, anxiety or other symptoms start to come back, stop the holidays, go back to daily doses and call your prescriber.
6. **Keep score, then review.** Rate each holiday on page 2. The studies ran for 4 to 8 weeks; review it with your prescriber after about a month.

SIGNS IT IS WORKING

- Sex is easier on holiday days.
- Withdrawal feelings are absent, or mild and gone once you restart.
- Your mood and anxiety stay steady from week to week.

STOP THE HOLIDAYS AND CALL YOUR PRESCRIBER IF

- You get withdrawal symptoms each time.
- Your mood or anxiety starts to slip.
- You find yourself skipping more days than planned.
- It has not helped after about four weekends.

QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK

QUESTION	ANSWER
Why does it work?	Medicines like sertraline drop to about half their level in a day or so, so by the second day the level is low enough for sex to be easier. Fluoxetine takes weeks to leave, so a short break changes nothing.
Will my depression come back?	In the studies, most people stayed well, but a few had more symptoms. That is why your mood should be steady first, and why you watch it each week.
Can I do it every weekend?	People in the studies did it every weekend for 4 to 8 weeks. Longer has not been studied, so review it with your prescriber.
I take my dose at night. Does the plan change?	Yes. Ask your prescriber how to shift the days so the skipped doses fall before the time you plan for sex.
What if it does not help?	Other options include a lower dose, an added medicine, or a switch. The “Sexual Side Effects on an Antidepressant” guide explains them.

MY HOLIDAY LOG

WEEK	DAYS SKIPPED	RESTARTED ON TIME?	WITHDRAWAL (0 TO 10)	MOOD (0 TO 10)	SEX (0 TO 10)
Week 1					
Week 2					
Week 3					
Week 4					
Week 5					
Week 6					

Rate withdrawal from 0 (none) to 10 (severe). Rate mood and sex from 0 (the worst) to 10 (your best).

GET HELP RIGHT AWAY

Call 911 for fainting, a seizure, or if you are in danger of harming yourself.

Thoughts of suicide, or a sharp drop in mood: stop the holidays, call or text 988, and call your prescriber right away.

Call your prescriber the same day if withdrawal symptoms do not settle within a day of restarting your dose.

If anyone takes too much, call Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 right away, even if they seem fine. Call 911 instead if they collapse, have a seizure, have trouble breathing or cannot be woken.

MY PLAN

My antidepressant and dose:

My holiday days, and my restart time:

What I do if I feel withdrawal:

When I review this with my prescriber:

My prescriber’s phone number:

Questions for my next visit:

Source. Written in new words for patients from a 1995 study of weekend drug holidays (Rothschild, American Journal of Psychiatry), two small randomized trials in women (2023) and men (2024), and the FDA-approved antidepressant labels on stopping suddenly. A medication holiday is not in any FDA label; plan it with your prescriber.

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