psychofarm

MEDICATION HOW-TO

Sweating Too Much on an Antidepressant

What helps, and medicines that can be added

For people with heavy sweating or night sweats on an antidepressant: everyday fixes, dose changes, and the add-on medicines and their cautions.

Heavy sweating is a common side effect of many antidepressants, especially **venlafaxine** (Effexor), **duloxetine** (Cymbalta), **desvenlafaxine** (Pristiq) and **levomilnacipran** (Fetzima), and also many SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, such as sertraline and escitalopram) and bupropion. It is often worst at night, or on the face, scalp, chest and back, and it comes from the medicine's effect on the nerves that switch sweating on, not from being too hot. It is not dangerous in itself, but soaked shirts and sheets wear people down, and it is a common reason people stop a medicine that is helping. Most people can get relief.

FIRST, MAKE SURE IT IS THE MEDICINE

- It started, or got worse, after starting or raising the antidepressant.
- See your doctor if you also have fever, weight loss, a cough or swollen glands, or if the night sweats began before the medicine. These need a check.
- Hot flashes in perimenopause, an overactive thyroid, low blood sugar and alcohol withdrawal can also cause sweating.
- **Sweating with agitation, shaking, twitching muscles, fever or diarrhea**, soon after a dose increase or a new medicine, can be serotonin syndrome. Go to the ER.

TRY THESE FIRST

1. **Cool the room.** A fan, a cooler bedroom, light bedding, and breathable or moisture-wicking clothes. Keep a towel and a spare shirt by the bed.
2. **Use a clinical-strength antiperspirant at night.** Put it on dry skin of the underarms, hands or feet at bedtime and wash it off in the morning; it works better while sweat glands are quiet. Stop if your skin gets irritated.
3. **Cut the triggers.** Caffeine, alcohol, spicy food and hot drinks, especially in the evening, can make it worse.
4. **Ask about a lower dose.** Sweating often depends on the dose, and a smaller dose may still work for your mood.
5. **Ask about a switch.** Another antidepressant may cause less sweating. Your prescriber plans any switch, so you avoid withdrawal.
6. **Track it.** Rate it each day on page 2 for a week before and after any change, so you can tell what helped.

MEDICINES THAT CAN BE ADDED

MEDICINE	HOW IT HELPS	WHAT TO WATCH FOR
Terazosin (an alpha blocker, also used for blood pressure and the prostate)	Blocks the nerve signal that drives the sweating. In a small study, most people improved.	Dizziness or fainting when you stand, mostly after the first doses: take the first dose at bedtime, get up slowly, and do not drive for 12 hours after the first dose, a dose increase, or restarting after a break. Tell an eye surgeon before cataract surgery.
Oxybutynin or glycopyrrolate (drying medicines)	Dry up the sweat glands.	Dry mouth, constipation, blurry vision, trouble passing urine. You can overheat in hot weather or hard exercise. Older adults may get confused.
Cyproheptadine or benztropine	Helped in case reports.	Cyproheptadine causes sleepiness and more appetite, and may weaken the antidepressant for some people. Benztropine dries like the medicines above.

None of these is FDA-approved for this, and the evidence is small studies and case reports. Your prescriber may try one, judge it over a week or two, and stop it if it does not help.

QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK

QUESTION	ANSWER
Will it go away on its own?	Sometimes it eases over the first weeks. If it has lasted more than a month, it is worth acting on.
What about other treatments?	For underarms, hands or feet, a dermatologist can offer prescription antiperspirants, medicated wipes, or injections.

ON A DRYING MEDICINE: HEAT SAFETY

- You may not sweat enough to cool down. In hot weather or exercise, drink water, rest in shade or air conditioning, and take breaks.
- Skip saunas and hot tubs.
- Hot, dry skin, a headache, dizziness, nausea or confusion means you are overheating: cool off right away, and call 911 if you are confused.

GOOD TO KNOW

- Terazosin plus sildenafil (Viagra) or tadalafil (Cialis) can drop your blood pressure. Ask first.
- Do not stop your antidepressant on your own: that can cause withdrawal and bring symptoms back.
- Sweating usually eases within days to a few weeks after a lower dose or a switch.
- Tell every clinician and your pharmacist what you take.

MY SWEATING LOG

DAY	NIGHT SWEATS (0 TO 10)	DAYTIME (0 TO 10)	CHANGED SHIRT OR SHEETS?	WHAT I TRIED
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				
Day 6				
Day 7				

Rate sweating from 0 (none) to 10 (soaked).

GET HELP RIGHT AWAY

Call 911 for fainting; swelling of the face, lips or throat, or trouble breathing; or confusion, collapse or very hot skin in the heat.

Go to the ER for sweating with agitation, shaking, twitching or stiff muscles, fever or diarrhea (possible serotonin syndrome); an erection that lasts more than 4 hours (rare, with terazosin); being unable to pass urine at all; or eye pain with blurred vision.

Call your prescriber the same day for trouble passing urine, or dizziness most of the time.

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:

When the sweating is worst:

What I am trying first:

Added medicine and dose (if prescribed):

When to check back:

My prescriber's phone number:

Source. Written in new words for patients from the FDA-approved terazosin and oxybutynin labels, a 2005 review of antidepressant-induced sweating, and an open-label study of terazosin. Add-on medicines for this are off label. Your prescriber decides any change.

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