

ANTIDEPRESSANTS AND SEXUAL SIDE EFFECTS

Dear Dr. K.,

His doctor placed my husband on an antidepressant. He feels better but our sex life is now non-existent. It wasn't so good when he was depressed and I expected that to change with his feeling better. Could it be the medicine?

Brenda, Jersey City

Dear Brenda,

I'm happy to hear that your husband is feeling better. Many people never seek help for their depression (because that would be weak and they should be able to handle it on their own) and continue to feel miserable when there is help available. I'm glad your husband mentioned it to his doctor.

There are many antidepressants available with some being around more than forty years. Some antidepressants, those called SSRI's (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors) are more likely to cause sexual side effects in men and women than other types. These antidepressants primarily include Celexa, Prozac, Lexapro, Zoloft, and Paxil. The side effects usually are a diminishment or absence of the sex drive (not becoming aroused) or a delayed or absent orgasm. It's estimated that this side effect can occur in 30-40% of people taking these types of medicine and it's not necessarily related to how much of the medicine a person is taking whether a low or higher dose. You didn't say how long your husband has been on the medicine. Sometimes, over a few weeks, the side effect goes away.

If your husband wants to stay on the medicine because it's working for him, there are some options his doctor might try. If he has an inability to become aroused, there are the erectile dysfunction medicines like Viagra, Levitra and Cialis. There are some other medicines that may decrease the sexual effect of the antidepressant but he would have to discuss that with his doctor. Usually, those medicines have their own set of side effects and prove to be problematic too. The dose of his medicine can always be lowered but we usually don't do that since he is doing well.

There are other antidepressants that can be tried which have less sexual side effects. These would include Cymbalta, Effexor and Remeron. Older antidepressants like Elavil, Pamelar and Tofranil can also be in this group but they tend to have other side effects like weight gain, sedation and constipation.

There is one antidepressant, Wellbutrin, which has almost zero sexual side effects and is frequently tried if an antidepressant is causing sexual concerns. Sometimes, the Wellbutrin is given with the SSRI and lessens the sexual side effect. The alternative is stopping your husband's present medicine and trying the Wellbutrin.

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There is no superior antidepressant that works better than another. They all can work well in treating depression. The issue is which one best works for you. Sometimes one SSRI causes sexual side effects and another doesn't.

The main thing is for your husband not to give up on getting treatment (especially since he's feeling better) and for him and you to seek out from his physician what can be done for the sexual problem possibly caused by the medicine.

Dr. K.

Dr. K is Stan Kapuchinski, M.D., a board-certified psychiatrist still practicing in Punta Gorda, FL. For an appointment or if you have questions, please email him at DrK@StopYourMisery.com. Dr. K.'s book, ***Say Goodbye To Your PDI (Personality Disordered Individual), Recognize People Who Make You Miserable and Eliminate Them From Your Life for Good!*** is available at Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble Booksellers, and HCI Books. Visit his website: www.StopYourMisery.com
