A "Dose" of Clarity!

A series by ASPET Transforming Discoveries into Therapies

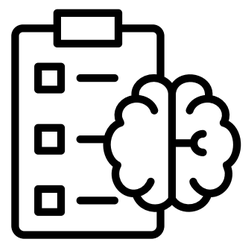
SSRIs Part 3

SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) treat depression and anxiety by increasing serotonin, a brain chemical that improves mood and emotion balance. SSRIs work by blocking serotonin reuptake, so more of it stays available between brain cells.

Myth: Antidepressants increase risk of suicide.

In 2004, the FDA **added a boxed warning about suicidal thoughts and behaviors in children and adolescents taking antidepressants.**

This was based on an FDA meta-analysis of nearly 100,000 participants, which found **suicidal thoughts and behaviors in ~4% of youth taking antidepressants versus 2% receiving placebo.**[1]



For children and adolescents with depression, **clinicians weigh antidepressant benefits and risks based on *individual* patient factors.**[3]



Antidepressants remain safe and effective for many young patients.

Despite this difference, no suicides occurred in the clinical trials and the FDA emphasizes that **depression itself increases risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors.**[2] Thus, there is **no causal evidence** that antidepressants increase suicide deaths in children and adolescents.

Click here to learn more about antidepressant use in children and teens.

1. Friedman, R. (2014, October 30). Antidepressants' black-box warning — 10 years later | New England Journal of Medicine. The New England Journal of Medicine. https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp1408480
2. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (n.d.). Class Suicidality Labeling Language for Antidepressants. https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/drugsatfda_docs/label/2005/20031s045,20936s020lbl.pdf
3. Geoffroy M, Baker-Sullivan E, Nitu NJ, et al. Risk and Protective Factors for Suicide Mortality in Youths: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. JAMA Netw Open. 2026;9(7):e2621622. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2026.21622