

# Many Prescribers Are Unable to Safely Taper Antidepressants, So Patients Go Online for Withdrawal Help, Survey Finds

*Researchers highlight the urgent need for proven strategies to reduce the risk, severity and duration of antidepressant withdrawal symptoms.*

WASHINGTON, DC, US, April 12, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A new survey of antidepressant users who turned to online peer-support groups for advice on withdrawal found that a large majority did so because their prescribers were [unable to help](#) them safely discontinue the drugs.

The online survey was completed by 1,271 antidepressant users from 49 countries who had turned to online groups offering peer support to people who want to stop taking the drugs.

The results showed that 71% of respondents rated their prescribers' advice as unhelpful. The main reasons given were that the prescribers gave a tapering schedule that was too fast, they were not familiar enough with withdrawal symptoms to give advice, or they advised discontinuation would not cause withdrawal symptoms. The researchers conducting the survey noted possible bias in the results because those responding may have had a tougher withdrawal experience than antidepressant users in general.

Some 45 million Americans take antidepressants, with about half of them using the drugs for five years or longer. The average length of time patients take antidepressants has doubled since the



Surveyed antidepressant users reported their prescribers were unable to help them safely discontinue the drug, in many cases because the prescriber was not familiar enough with withdrawal symptoms or thought discontinuation would not cause withdrawal symptoms.

mid-2000s in the U.S. One reason for this increase is that withdrawal symptoms can be so troubling that users opt to continue taking their antidepressants.

“Antidepressant withdrawal is characterised by many and varied symptoms, physical and emotional, that can appear days, weeks or even months after stopping antidepressants, and which can exceed the intensity of the problems for which the drugs were prescribed,” according to lead author John Read, PhD, professor of psychology at the University of East London in the U.K., writing in the *Journal of Psychiatric Research*.



Research has found that more than half (56%) of people who attempt to come off antidepressants experience withdrawal symptoms, with nearly half (46%) of them rating those symptoms as severe.

The most common antidepressant withdrawal symptoms include anxiety, flu-like symptoms, insomnia, nausea, dizziness, electric shock-like sensations (“brain zaps” and “body zaps”), diarrhea, headaches, muscle spasms and tremors, agitation, hallucinations, confusion, and irritability. Some research has also found evidence that antidepressant withdrawal can cause mania, emotional blunting and an inability to cry, and long-term or even permanent sexual dysfunction.

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A 2019 study found that [more than half](#) (56%) of people who attempt to come off antidepressants experience withdrawal symptoms, with nearly half (46%) of them describing those symptoms as severe, and that the symptoms may last for weeks or months.

“Current U.K. and U.S.A. guidelines underestimate the severity and duration of antidepressant withdrawal, with significant clinical implications,” the investigators in that study wrote.

Researchers in these and other studies have highlighted the urgent need for proven strategies for reducing the risk, severity and duration of antidepressant withdrawal symptoms.

Still more fundamentally, the common reason given for prescribing antidepressants – to correct

a chemical imbalance in the brain – was found to have [no scientific basis](#). A 2022 study investigated whether evidence supported the theory that a low level of the brain chemical serotonin causes depression.

“The serotonin theory of depression has been one of the most influential and extensively researched biological theories of the origins of depression,” the researchers wrote. “Our study shows that this view is not supported by scientific evidence. It also calls into question the basis for the use of antidepressants.”

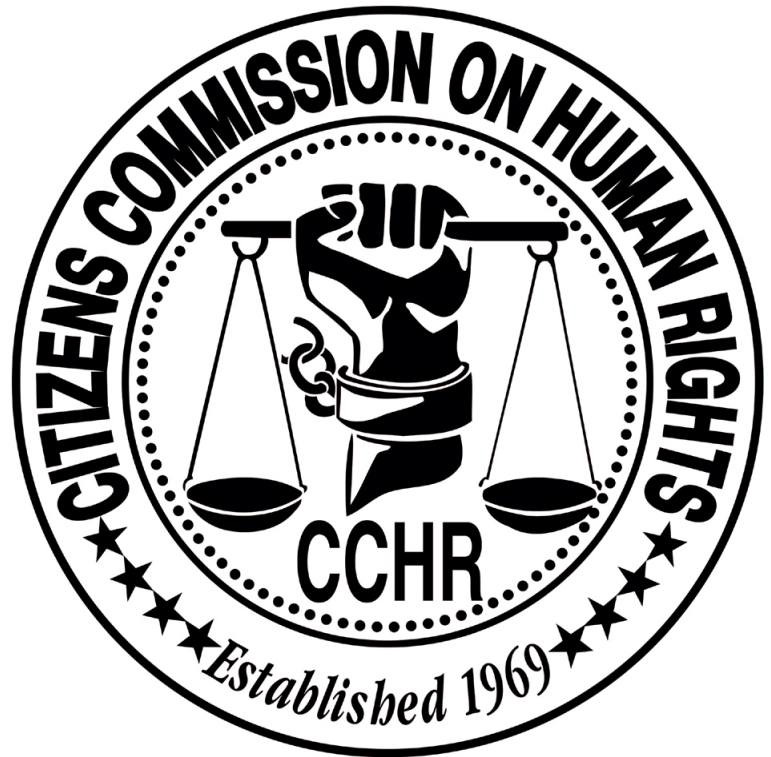
Prescribing antidepressants for depression was challenged in another 2022 study which found no clinically significant difference in measures of depression symptoms between adults treated with antidepressants and those taking placebos, whether over a shorter or longer timeframe and regardless of the depression severity of the study participants. [1]

Still another study indicated that taking antidepressants led to worse depression symptoms years later. Researchers found that those who used antidepressants at any time during the 30-year period of the study had an 81% greater chance of having more severe depression symptoms at the end of the study. [2]

**WARNING:** Anyone wishing to discontinue or change the dose of an antidepressant or any psychiatric drug is cautioned to do so only under the supervision of a physician because of potentially dangerous withdrawal symptoms.

The Citizens Commission on Human Rights (CCHR) continues to raise public awareness of the risks of serious side effects and withdrawal symptoms from antidepressants and other psychiatric drugs, so that consumers – and their physicians can make fully informed decisions about starting or stopping the drugs. CCHR supports safe and science-based non-drug approaches to mental health.

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screenings, and a review of all current medications to identify any physical causes of depression or other unwanted mental and emotional symptoms, which might otherwise be misdiagnosed and incorrectly treated as a psychiatric disorder.

The Citizens Commission on Human Rights was co-founded in 1969 by members of the Church of Scientology and the late psychiatrist and humanitarian Thomas Szasz, M.D., recognized by many academics as modern psychiatry's most authoritative critic, to eradicate abuses and restore human rights and dignity to the field of mental health. CCHR has been instrumental in obtaining 228 laws against psychiatric abuses and violations of human rights worldwide.

The CCHR National Affairs Office in Washington, DC, has advocated for mental health rights and protections at the state and federal level. The CCHR traveling exhibit, which has toured 441 major cities worldwide and educated over 800,000 people on the history to the present day of abusive and racist psychiatric practices, has been displayed at the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Annual Legislative Conference in Washington, DC, and at other locations.

[1] <https://dtb.bmj.com/content/dtb/60/1/7.full.pdf>

[2] <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29680831/>

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