

The antidepressant nightmare

Advice Line

by Dr. Betty Phillips



"Help!" A number of people have asked me to look into the problems with antidepressants and withdrawing from these drugs.

"What's wrong with me? I'm a wreck! I'm crying all the time. My moods are going up and down. I tried to get off my antidepressant but I can't. I'm even getting shocks in my brain. I read on the Internet about brain zaps but I really can't find how to get rid of them. My doctor said I need to go back on a higher level of antidepressants. I feel trapped!"

The problem is indeed serious. A recent *Newsweek* cover (2-8-10) heralded, "Antidepressants Don't Work." The inside headline stated, "Studies suggest that the popular drugs are not more effective than a placebo." In bold the headline continued, "In fact they may be worse."

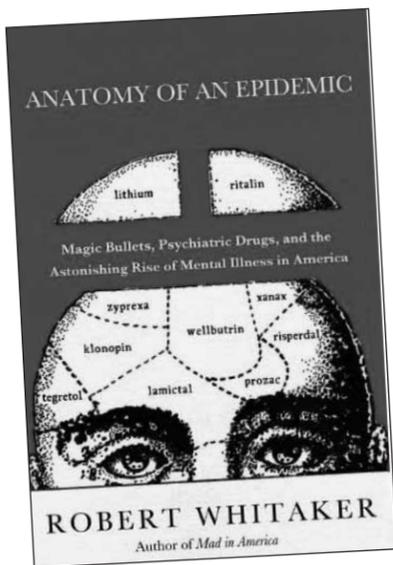
A number of research-based books have recently been published.

Anatomy of an Epidemic: Magic Bullets, Psychiatric Drugs, and the Astonishing Rise of Mental Illness in America (Whitaker, Crown, 2010) analyzed the results of long-term studies demonstrating that mental illness is increasingly prevalent in our country.

Astonishingly, Whitaker describes that antidepressant drugs are actually causing an increase in depression. It has been known for a long time that depression is episodic and will remit

on its own. But now 85 percent of individuals with major depression treated with an antidepressant start having continuing relapses and become chronically depressed!

All this is quite confusing because of the popular belief that depression is caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain. As Whitaker states, "The story that people with mental disorders have known chemical imbalances — that's a lie." Whitaker explained that the antidepressants increase serotonin levels in the brain over a short period of time. Then, however, the brain stops producing serotonin itself and reduces the number of serotonin receptors in the brain so the individual becomes dependent upon receiving serotonin artificially.



Whitaker describes other possible negative effects of antidepressant use including the risk of conversion to

bipolar depression, a serious debilitating illness, for about 25 percent of long-term adult users of antidepressants. Whitaker also discusses a risk of cognitive decline associated with long-term use of antidepressants. These negative effects occur in adults but are also seen with increasing frequency in children and adolescents.

Long-term studies are documenting additional medical risks. The Women's Health Initiative found that women taking antidepressants had more deaths from any cause and more deaths from stroke than the rest of the group. Another example of the kind of findings that are being reported is the risk of serious gastrointestinal bleeding with antidepressant drugs.

The public may not be aware that almost 50 percent discontinue antidepressants within the first three months because of "side" effects such as fatigue, anxiety, insomnia, headaches and nausea. A number of other antidepressant users discontinue their drugs later because the drugs stop producing positive effects and/or they produce persistent negative effects such as weight gain, low energy, chronic insomnia, flat affect and relationship problems due to low libido. And if someone begins to taper off the drugs, the withdrawal problems begin.

This is where I started my article. How to withdraw from these drugs? Unanticipated symptoms include electrical shocks described as "brain zaps" but also anxiety, crying spells, insomnia, irritability, agitation, mood swings, difficulty with concentration and memory, impulsive aggression, dizziness, headaches, vertigo, tremors, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, chills, fatigue, lethargy, pains, excessive sweating, and yes, even depression.

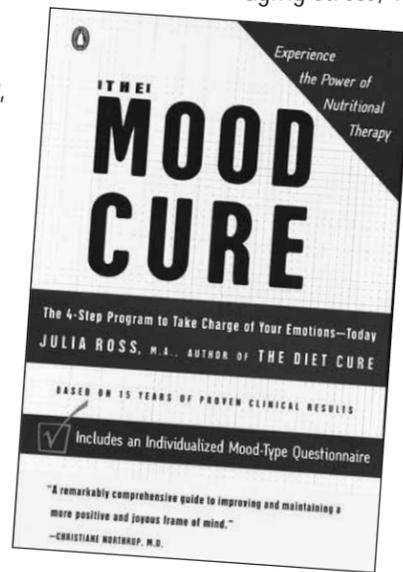
The most helpful book I have found so far is *The Mood Cure* (Penguin, 2003) by Julia Ross, which discusses natural alternatives to antidepressant drugs and provides specific suggestions for withdrawal from these drugs. Ross has found that "research supports our clinic's experience of over 15 years that natural

methods can easily meet or exceed the benefits of SSRIs... They typically do much better off SSRIs than on them."

There are many options for coping with depression other than a magic pill that turns into a nightmare. Improving your life in any way, increasing happiness and managing stress, will make major

inroads into reducing depression. You may find a holistic psychiatrist or practitioner of natural medicine to assist you. You may also receive practical advice from a therapist who is experienced in utilizing holistic as well as cognitive-behavioral approaches to life improve-

ment. Please consult a more extensive article on my website with additional resources about this topic. If you are trying to withdraw from antidepressants, I send you my best wishes for success.



Need advice?

Send Dr. Betty Phillips questions about individual, relationship, marriage or family issues to BettyPhillips@BellSouth.net or 466 Eagle Point Road, Pittsboro 27312. Questions can be anonymous. Betty looks forward to hearing from you!

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