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BIPOLAR DISORDERS Factsheet

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What are antidepressants?

Most antidepressants increase serotonin or noradrenaline, and are effective for the treatment of unipolar depression. However, as they may increase the risk of phase shifting from depression to mania in people with bipolar disorder, they are generally used only when the depressive phase is severe and shows poor response to mood stabilisers or antipsychotics.

What is the evidence for antidepressants as treatment for bipolar disorder?

Moderate to high quality evidence suggests second generation antidepressants (with or without mood stabilisers), are a more effective long-term prophylactic treatment for relapse to depression than placebo (with or without mood stabilisers). Moderate to low quality evidence suggests no differences in relapse rates to depression or mania between antidepressants and mood stabilisers.

Moderate quality evidence suggests ~19% of people with bipolar depression taking antidepressants switch to mania. Switching rates are highest in people with a family history of affective disorders, previous suicide attempts, depression polarity of the index episode, lifetime psychotic features, and rapid-cycling course. Rates were lowest in people taking antidepressants with concurrent lithium.

For more information see the technical table



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NeuRA (Neuroscience Research Australia) is one of the largest independent medical and clinical research institutes in Australia and an international leader in neurological research.

Diseases of the brain and nervous system pose the greatest health, economic and social burden of any disease group because they are chronic, debilitating and have no known cures.

Medical research is the cornerstone of efforts to advance the health and wellbeing of families and the community. Our dedicated scientists are focussed on transforming their research into significant and practical benefits for all patients.

While we hope you find this information useful, it is always important to discuss any questions about bipolar disorder or its treatment with your doctor or other health care provider.

HOW YOUR SUPPORT HELPS

We are able to make significant advances due to the generosity of countless people. Your donation allows us to continue to work towards transforming lives. For information on how you can support our research, phone **1300 888 019** or make a secure donation at neura.edu.au.