

What is SSRI Withdrawal?

SSRI withdrawal, also known as SSRI discontinuation syndrome, refers to the range of physical, emotional, and cognitive symptoms that can occur when a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) medication is reduced too quickly or stopped altogether. SSRIs change how serotonin functions in the brain, and when the body no longer receives its usual dose, it can take time for the nervous system to adjust. Symptoms often include dizziness, “brain zaps,” flu-like sensations, sleep disturbances, anxiety, irritability, and mood swings.



Is it SSRI Withdrawal or a relapse?

Distinguishing between withdrawal and relapse can be challenging, but there are important differences. Withdrawal symptoms usually appear within days to weeks of lowering or stopping an SSRI, and often include unusual physical sensations such as electric-shock-like feelings, imbalance, nausea, and sensory changes that are not typical of depression itself. These symptoms also tend to improve fairly quickly if the SSRI is reinstated at the prior dose. Relapse, on the other hand, typically develops more gradually and mirrors the emotional and cognitive patterns of the original condition, such as persistent sadness, hopelessness, or loss of interest, without the added physical symptoms. Careful attention to timing, the nature of the symptoms, and medical guidance can help clarify what’s happening and guide the next steps.

6 SSRI Withdrawal Facts

- Very common, often overlooked
- Not the same as relapse
- Short-acting drugs hit harder
- Slow tapering reduces risk
- Waves and windows are normal
- Withdrawal can last 2+ years

Waves & Windows

“Waves and windows” is a term often used by people going through SSRI withdrawal to describe the up-and-down pattern of symptoms over time.

A wave is when withdrawal symptoms return or intensify. Waves begin with physical symptoms followed by emotional symptoms developing. These emotional symptoms include ruminating thoughts, depression, and anxiety. Suicidal ideation is commonly reported. The brain is unable to process rational thoughts and impulsivity is a concern.

A window is when symptoms ease or disappear, and a person feels more like their “normal” self.

Waves and windows can last months or even years after your last dose of antidepressant medications.

