



Anxiety Medications

Anxiety is the most common mental illness affecting people today with one-in-eight people suffering from some kind of anxiety disorder in their lifetime. Anxiety disorder treatment often requires a combination approach: Therapy and anxiety medications.

Anxiety medications can help control anxiety both in the long and short term. Some anxiety drugs are indicated for acute anxiety while others help anxiety disorders overall. Antidepressants, benzodiazepines, beta-blockers and antipsychotics can all be used as an anti-anxiety medication. (complete list of anxiety medications)

Antidepressant Drugs for Anxiety

The usual anti-anxiety drug of choice is from a class of antidepressants known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). While these medications are, primarily, antidepressants, many have been shown as effective drugs for anxiety as well. Medications that work on the brain chemical, norepinephrine, as well as serotonin are also used as drugs for anxiety. SSRIs are nonaddictive medications and are generally taken long-term. An anti-anxiety effect from SSRIs is usually seen in 2-4 weeks depending on how fast the dosage is increased. SSRIs for anxiety are known to be helpful for:

- Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)
- Panic disorder
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- Social phobia

A list of common, modern antidepressant anxiety medication that works on the brain chemicals serotonin and norepinephrine includes:

- [Citalopram \(Celexa\)](#) – off label for panic disorder, social phobia and trichotillomania
- [Duloxetine \(Cymbalta\)](#) – approved for generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)
- [Escitalopram \(Lexapro\)](#) – approved for GAD
- [Fluoxetine \(Prozac\)](#) – approved for OCD and panic disorder
- [Fluvoxamine \(Luvox\)](#) - approved for OCD in children (8-17 y) and adults
- [Paroxetine \(Paxil\)](#) – approved for obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), panic disorder, social phobia, GAD and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- [Sertraline \(Zoloft\)](#) – approved for panic disorder, PTSD, social phobia and OCD
- [Trazodone \(Desyrel\)](#) – off label for panic disorders
- [Venlafaxine \(Effexor XR\)](#) - approved for GAD, panic disorder and social anxiety disorder in adults

One medication, **Buspirone (BuSpar)**, is known specifically as an anti-anxiety drug. It is sometimes considered an antidepressant but is really unrelated to other classes of drugs. Buspirone (BuSpar) is taken long-term and takes 2-3 weeks to take effect.

Tricyclic Antidepressant Drugs for Anxiety

An older type of antidepressant called a tricyclic antidepressant is also sometimes used to treat depression. Tricyclics act on more chemicals in the brain and are more likely to cause side effects so they are not typically a first choice treatment. A list of tricyclic antidepressants used to treat anxiety includes:⁵

- [Clomipramine \(Anafranil\)](#) – approved for OCD
- [Desipramine \(Norpramin\)](#) – off label for panic disorder
- [Doxepin \(Sinequan\)](#) – off label for GAD
- [Imipramine \(Tofranil\)](#)- off label for panic disorder

Monoamine oxidase inhibitors

Another powerful, older class of antidepressants is also used to treat anxiety. These monoamine oxidase inhibitors (moai) are not first choice treatments but may be useful where other treatments have failed.

List of Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors used to treat anxiety

- Isocarboxazid (Marplan) – off label for social phobia
- [Phenelzine \(Nardil\)](#) – off label for panic disorders and social phobia
- Selegiline (Emsam) – off label for social phobia
- [Tranylcypromine \(Parnate\)](#) – off label for social phobia

Benzodiazepines for Anxiety

Benzodiazepines are common antianxiety medications that are primarily taken short-term. Usage of this type of antianxiety drug is generally confined to six weeks or less or is used to treat acute episodes like panic attacks. Benzodiazepines (often just known as benzos) are often used in addition to other antianxiety medication like an SSRI. Some people on benzodiazepines run the risk of dependence, abuse and withdrawal so any time benzos are prescribed, their use should be carefully monitored. Because of this risk, benzodiazepines are not recommended for use in those who have previously had drug or alcohol use issues. Benzodiazepines can be used to treat virtually any type of anxiety including:

- Panic attacks
- Situational anxiety
- Adjustment disorder

List of Benzodiazepines used to treat anxiety

- [Alprazolam \(Xanax\)](#) – approved for GAD, panic disorder; used off-label for agoraphobia with social phobia
- [Chlordiazepoxide \(Librium\)](#) – approved for anxiety (in general)
- [Clonazepam \(Klonopin\)](#) – approved for panic disorder; used off label for anxiety (in general)
- [Diazepam \(Valium\)](#) – approved for anxiety (in general)
- [Lorazepam \(Ativan\)](#) – approved for anxiety disorders (in general)
- [Oxazepam \(Serax\)](#) – approved for anxiety (in general)

List of Anticonvulsants Used to Treat Anxiety

While considered investigational, some anticonvulsants (antiseizure medication) are sometimes prescribed off-label to treat anxiety. This may be due to their ability to increase a chemical in the brain known as gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA). GABA tends to calm the central nervous system which is helpful in those with anxiety.

A list of anticonvulsants used to treat anxiety off label include:

- [Divalproex \(Depakote, Depakote ER\)](#)
- [Gabapentin \(Neurontin\)](#)
- [Pregabalin \(Lyrica\)](#)

Blood Pressure Drugs Including Beta-Blockers for Anxiety

This type of drug is known as an antihypertensive agent. In other words, these are drugs designed to decrease blood pressure. Antihypertensives may have a positive effect on the physiological effects of anxiety. These anti-anxiety drugs are designed to be taken at the time of anxiety but their effect may be felt for up to one week afterward. Beta-blockers also belong in this class of medication and several beta-blockers for anxiety have been shown useful. Drugs in this class are mostly considered investigational in the area of anxiety. However, studies have shown that beta-blockers may be useful in situational / performance anxiety as well as posttraumatic stress disorder.

List of Beta-Blockers for anxiety

- Atenolol (Tenormin) off label for situational/performance anxiety
- Nadolol (Corgard) – off label for situational/performance anxiety
- Propranolol (Inderal, Betachron E-R, InnoPran XL) – off label for panic disorder, situational/performance anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder and anxiety in general

Antipsychotic Anxiety Medication

While the name "antipsychotic" suggests the drug is used to treat psychosis, antipsychotics are used in many other ways as well and taking one does not indicate the presence of psychosis. Antipsychotics are often used to improve the effectiveness of other anxiety medication. Antipsychotics may also be used on their own, but are considered a second choice antianxiety medication. Antipsychotics are long-term treatment options mostly used in the treatment of generalized anxiety disorder. Both older and newer, known as typical and atypical, antipsychotics can be used as anxiety drugs but the older, typical antipsychotics have a greater likelihood of side effects.

All antipsychotics run the possibly life-threatening risk of:

- Neuroleptic malignant syndrome
- Muscle movement disorders such as acute dystonias and tardive dyskinesia
- Weight gain
- Metabolic syndrome
- Potential to cause diabetic ketoacidosis
- stroke, hypertension, hypotension, or sudden death from cardiac conduction or cardiac electrophysiological abnormalities

Antipsychotic drugs are often used in combination with other anxiety medication. They are a second-line option due to the possibility of severe side effects.

A list of antipsychotic drugs used to treat anxiety includes:

- Molindone (Moban) – research suggests antianxiety properties
- [Olanzapine \(Zyprexa\)](#) – off label use for anxiety (in general)
- [Quetiapine \(Seroquel\)](#) – pending FDA-approval for GAD
- [Risperidone \(Risperdal\)](#) – off label use for anxiety (in general)