

Antidepressants are not 'happy pills'

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Depression medicines are not 'happy pills' or 'a quick fix'—these are the views of people who use antidepressants that have been recorded in a series of frank, heartfelt video interviews.

The videos have been carried out as part of a research project by The University of Nottingham and Oxford University. They have been made into an information resource for the public and published on Healthtalkonline.org—a charity website providing information about [health issues](#) in the form of real stories in video, audio and the written word.

More than 30 people shared their personal stories for this project. They talked about the impact of antidepressants and depression on their lives and the difficulties they encountered with side effects and finding a prescription that worked for them.

Claire Anderson, Professor of Social Pharmacy, at The University of Nottingham said: "This project will be important for educating both patients and healthcare professionals about what it is actually like to take antidepressants. When prescribed an antidepressant for the first time people often want to know more about what to expect; how they might feel when they are taking them, how long they take to work, how long they should expect to take them for and about potential side effects. They clearly value being able to hear about other people's experiences."

The experiences of others

The interviews also highlighted the role of doctors in helping people to find an antidepressant that suits them. Susan Kirkpatrick, senior qualitative researcher for the Health Experiences Research Group at Oxford University, said: "Recent media reports on the rise of antidepressant prescribing have suggested that GPs are too ready to hand out prescriptions. Some people did comment that their doctor had been quick to reach for the prescription pad, but this varied widely. It was the amount of care, time and support doctors provided that seemed more important to the people we spoke to."

Some of the interviewees explained that finding the right medication could be like 'waving a magic wand' but others struggled with unpleasant side effects, such as anxiety, loss of sex-drive, headaches and feeling 'detached'. It took some people several years to find a medicine that worked for them, and this could mean simply being able to 'manage' their depression, along with other strategies such as therapy. Some said they had never found one that was effective.

One of the interviewees, 36 year old Jenny, first experienced depression as a teenager and has been on three different antidepressants. Initially she had high hopes; "I sort of expected to feel 'happy' because the media were dubbing antidepressants as 'happy pills'" she says. "I now know that

they don't stop me feeling down when it is natural to feel down; rather they prevent me from getting stuck down there."

Interviewees described [side effects](#) such as anxiety, suicidal feelings, dizziness or loss of appetite that could last for a month or more and, in some cases, people actually felt worse than before they started taking the pills. Others needed to try several antidepressants before finding one that is effective.

Others had advice too, stressing that it was important to see [antidepressants](#) as just one aspect of the 'road to recovery' rather than a solution in itself.

More information: The antidepressants project can be viewed on the newly redesigned Healthtalkonline.org at healthtalkonline.org/peoples-e...nces-antidepressants

Provided by University of Nottingham

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