

Saffron effectively complements antidepressant medications

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New research has shown that saffron may assist adults with depression when it is taken in conjunction with pharmaceutical antidepressants.

Murdoch University researchers Dr. Adrian Lopresti and Professor Peter

Drummond, and UWA researcher Professor Sean Hood found greater reductions in [depressive symptoms](#) when adults with persistent depression, and currently taking a pharmaceutical antidepressant, complement their depression medication with [saffron](#) capsules.

Dr. Lopresti said that the trial was the largest of its kind to date and the first study looking at the effects of saffron as an add-on to pharmaceutical antidepressants. Previous research has only investigated the antidepressant effects of saffron as a stand-alone treatment.

"In our research, depressive symptoms decreased more in participants taking saffron compared with a placebo, with reductions of 41 and 21%, respectively on the clinician-rated scale," Dr. Lopresti said.

"In addition, improvements occurred in sleep quality, initiative and motivation, and interest and pleasure in activities."

Dr. Lopresti said that the study indicated that saffron could be used as a natural supplement given at the beginning of antidepressant treatment to increase its effectiveness and to possibly reduce potential adverse effects which are sometimes experienced when one is prescribed antidepressants.

"Saffron can be used at the outset in conjunction with antidepressants or it can be added to antidepressants if symptoms do not fully resolve," Dr. Lopresti said.

"At the moment, if pharmaceutical antidepressants aren't working the options are to increase the dose or to try a new antidepressant. This increases the likelihood of side effects. Now a new option is to take antidepressants and saffron together."

Background

- Participants in the survey were randomly allocated to one of two trial groups, one taking a placebo and one taking a standardized saffron extract.
- Participants were required to be physically healthy, aged 18–65 years and were taking a stable dose (at least eight weeks) of a single pharmaceutical antidepressant
- More research needs to be undertaken to replicate these findings and to determine the longer-term benefits of saffron in treating symptoms of depression.
- The findings do not mean the addition of saffron to cooking would necessarily promote antidepressant effects given the significant variance associated with the quality of saffron stigmas and the variability in extracts available on the market.
- This study was funded by the manufacturer of the saffron extract, Pharmactive Biotech Products SL. However, Pharmactive Biotech Products was not involved in the design of the research, analysis of data, or in the writing of the report.

More information: Adrian L Lopresti et al. Efficacy of a standardised saffron extract (affron®) as an add-on to antidepressant medication for the treatment of persistent depressive symptoms in adults: A randomised, double-blind, placebo-controlled study, *Journal of Psychopharmacology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/0269881119867703](https://doi.org/10.1177/0269881119867703)

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