

Antidepressants could be used as preventive for those with high risk of developing depression

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Antidepressants are well established for use in the treatment of depression, but new research by Keele University has shown that they

can potentially prevent the condition in people who are at high risk of developing depressive illness.

The study, led by Professor Saeed Farooq, found that using antidepressants as a pre-emptive measure could help to prevent depression in patients considered to be at high risk of developing the condition, for example following stroke or heart attack.

This is the first study to examine the effects of all available medicine-based interventions in preventing depression, with Professor Farooq and his colleagues looking at the results of a number of previous studies in this field to assess how effective these treatments are.

The 28 studies they analyzed considered a number of possible medical interventions for patients at high risk of developing depression, including antidepressants, hormone replacement therapies, and selenium, a mineral that has been linked to depression. The majority of the studies examined the effect of antidepressants in preventing depression associated with a stroke, Hepatitis C, or other physical conditions.

The analysis found that antidepressants were significantly more effective at preventing depression in these patients, compared to those who were given placebos.

While the researchers have said the results are promising, Professor Farooq said that further studies are needed using proper research designs. Most studies the researchers examined had relatively short follow-up periods, which is crucial as observation over a longer period of time is needed to establish the effectiveness of preventative treatments.

Professor Farooq added that this approach is not yet ready for use in routine clinical practice but needs to be tested in larger, well designed studies. He stressed that funding agencies such as Medical Research

Council UK need to prioritize research using pharmacological agents in preventing rather than treating depression.

Professor Farooq said: "Our study represents a major public health advance for preventing depression and we are not aware of any research that has shown such a significant effect of antidepressants in preventing [depression](#). If the findings are confirmed in future studies this will help to prevent a colossal burden of disease caused by depressive illness worldwide."

More information: Saeed Farooq et al. Pharmacological interventions for prevention of depression in high risk conditions: Systematic review and meta-analysis., *Journal of Affective Disorders* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jad.2020.03.024](#)

Provided by Keele University

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