

New postpartum depression drug comes with hefty price tag

November 8 2023, by Robin Foster



A new drug to treat postpartum depression will cost nearly \$16,000 for a

14-day course of treatment, a price tag that has doctors worried that some patients won't be able to afford the medication.

Zurzuva (zuranolone) was first [approved](#) by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration back in August, and it carried the distinction of being the first [postpartum depression](#) (PPD) [drug](#) that can be taken as a pill.

Despite Zurzuva's high cost, drugmaker Sage Therapeutics said Tuesday that the drug should hit the market by December and that it and partner Biogen are now talking with insurers about coverage of the medication.

The companies' goal is "to enable broad and equitable access for women with PPD who are prescribed this drug," Sage Chief Executive Officer [Barry Greene](#) said in a [company news release](#).

The hope is for patients to be able to get the medicine, "where possible, with little to no co-pay regardless of financial means." He added that the two companies will also help cover costs or provide the drug-free to certain patients.

Mental health experts have welcomed the drug's approval, not just because it presents a new way to treat postpartum depression but also because it "appears to be fast-acting," Dr. Catherine Monk, chief of the Division of Women's Mental Health in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City, told *CNN*.

In one company trial, Zurzuva [improved depressive symptoms](#) in as little as three days.

Prior to Zurzuva's approval, options to treat postpartum depression orally included [selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors](#) (SSRIs), but those

antidepressants "take weeks to kick in and must continue being taken on a daily basis for at least six to 12 months," [Dr. Katrina Furey](#), a psychiatrist specializing in women's [mental health](#) and reproductive psychiatry and a clinical instructor at Yale University, told *CNN*.

Still, SSRIs typically cost much less: [Prozac](#) and [Zoloft](#), and their generics, can run less than \$20 a month, according to Drugs.com.

"It remains to be seen how much insurance companies will cover it or if they will require women to 'fail' treatment with less expensive SSRIs before paying for this new treatment," Furey said. "I hope that is not the case and that its price will not be a barrier to accessing this treatment."

The \$15,900 price "raises substantial accessibility concerns, especially when we still don't know how it'll be covered by insurance," [Dr. Lindsay Allen](#), an assistant professor of emergency medicine and a health economist and health services researcher at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago, told *CNN*.

"Ensuring access to such treatments is imperative, as they may be lifesaving for new mothers during a vulnerable time," Allen said. "Suicide is a leading cause of death in the first year postpartum."

More information: *HealthDay* has more on [postpartum depression](#).

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