



LEAP
for
Prescribed
Drug
Dependence

Lived and professional Experience Advisory Panel

Survey results following the BBC Panorama documentary 2023

Following the BBC Panorama documentary shown on the 19th June, 530 people who had taken antidepressants for at least a month in the past five years responded to an anonymous online survey for UK patients designed by The Lived Experience Advisory Panel for Prescribed Drug Dependence (made up of people with both lived and professional experience of dependence and withdrawal from prescribed psychiatric and painkilling drugs).

Respondents were 71% women, 85% 25-64 years old, 93% 'white'

All NHS organisations in England, Northern Ireland and Wales were represented with between 1 and 27 participants each. 5 health boards in Scotland were unrepresented.

Results:

What has been your experience with stopping antidepressants?

able to stop with no major issues	10%
able to stop with some difficulty	10%
able to stop with great difficulty	34%
unable to stop despite wanting to	46%

(of those unable to stop) Why were you unable to stop?

withdrawal symptoms were intolerable	72%
return of my underlying condition	6%
both	16%
not sure	6%

Did you experience withdrawal effects when you stopped antidepressants or reduced the dose?

no withdrawal symptoms	6%
mild withdrawal symptoms	9%
moderate withdrawal symptoms	15%
severe withdrawal symptoms	70%

How long did the withdrawal symptoms last?

1 month or more	85%
4 months or more	68%
More than 12 months	44%

How did the process of withdrawal affect your life?

More than one answer could be given:

reduced social activities	70%
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<https://leap4pdd.org/>

impaired work function	54%
relationship stress or breakdown	53%
new or increased suicidality	44%
took sick leave from work	34%
financial difficulties	30%
reduced workload	20%
inability to access benefits because of lack of recognition by NHS	20%
loss of job	18%
physical accidents	16%
no negative impacts	9%
'other'	24%

[5% spontaneously reported sexual dysfunction/PSSD (Post-SSRI Sexual Dysfunction) under 'other']

Which of the following describes your experience with NHS?

More than one answer could be given:

told I can stop in a few days or weeks without problems	45%
unable to get informed advice about how to safely stop antidepressants	44%
told my withdrawal symptoms were a return of my underlying condition	41%
told I can stop by taking medication every other day	35%
told there are no withdrawal symptoms from stopping antidepressants	31%
doctor refused to prescribe liquids or other ways of making smaller doses	21%
NHS services have been helpful and adequate to help me stop antidepressants	8%

How helpful did you find the NHS in helping you to stop an antidepressant?

very unhelpful	46%
unhelpful	21%
neither/ not sure	23%
helpful	4%
very helpful	6%

Which of the following would you like to see provided by the NHS?

education for prescribers on withdrawal effects and how to taper safely	83%
better information around risk of withdrawal effects when antidepressants are offered	77%
more alternatives to medication	74%
easier availability of smaller doses of medication (e.g., liquids or smaller dose tablets)	73%
individualised, flexible withdrawal plan	68%
specialised clinics to provide advice and support while stopping	58%
24-hour helpline to provide advice and support while stopping	58%

Were you told about withdrawal effects when first prescribed antidepressants?

yes	3%
no	92%
not sure	5%

The sample as a whole did not hold particularly negative views about antidepressants in general, with more reporting them to be **helpful (41%)** than **unhelpful (33%)**; (26% were unsure).