

Social Anxiety or Social Phobia

A handy chart to help you compare the medicine treatments to help the symptoms of social anxiety

You might also want to look at the Handy Chart for anxiety

Please note: You are unique and this is only a guide!

This guide will be about right for most people, but not everyone. Some people may get better but some may stay the same. Some may improve quicker than other people. Some may get all the side effects in the book, others none at all. What happens to you will depend on your unique brain and your genes. However, this guide should help you to be able to choose between the many medicines. There are many other ways you can be helped e.g. talking therapies, help with coping with the symptoms, relaxation, and self-help.

No guide can be 100% unbiased, but we have tried hard to stick to the facts about medicines. We hope you take this guide in the way in which it is intended i.e. an honest attempt to inform, educate and help.

What the sections in the table mean:

Medicine – these are the main medicines to help treat the symptoms of **social phobia**, and a few others that are sometimes used.

- These medicines are in no special order, although the SSRIs are usually the first choice
- We have listed them as their “generic name” (the name of the actual drug).
- This is only a short guide. Please see the rest of our website for more help
- Not all these medicines work as well as each other. Your clinician may be able to help you choose which one (or ones) might be best for you.

Usual dose per day – this will depend on how well you do and what side effects you get. Some people need higher, some need lower doses. It is usually best to start a medicine slowly; it’s kinder to your brain.

How we think it might work – this is how we think the medicine works in the brain. There is more on this on our website. Taking two medicines with the same way of working doesn’t often help much. Serotonin, noradrenaline and GABA are some of the brain’s chemical messengers. Serotonin helps control mood, emotions, feeding and sleep. Noradrenaline helps control drive, motivation, alertness and sleep. GABA calms the brain.

How long it takes to work – this is just a guide as some people may get better quicker or slower. But don’t give up too early.

Some of the main side effects – these are just a few of the main side effects. Many are worse at higher doses, but most wear off after a few weeks.

- = Most people will get this side effect
- = Quite a few will get this side effect
- = Only a few people will get this side effect
- o = This is very rare or not known

The side effects here are:

- **Drowsiness** – feeling sleepy or doped up
- **Weight gain** – feeling more hungry and putting on weight
- **Nausea** – feeling sick, but not usually being sick
- **Dry mouth, blurred vision** – plus constipation, poor memory, difficulty passing urine (sometimes called “anticholinergic side effects”)
- **Sexual problems** – lack of desire, performance or pleasure

There are many other possible side effects.

Please see our website for more details of each of the medicines and side effects.

How long you could or should take it for - how long you take any medicine for will be up to you. Taking a medicine means remembering every day and may be also getting some side effects. It also often means you get well and stay well. You will need to decide what helps you best and what helps you get on with your life.

How to stop it – some medicines can be stopped quickly. Others should be stopped slowly. It is best to try to stop all medicines slowly – it’s kinder to your brain.

Tips on how to get the best out of medication:

- Read our website to make sure you know what the medicine is for, when and how to take it and for how long to take it
- Try to get the best out of one medicine before trying another. Get the right dose for you, try taking it at different times, and try to cope with any side effects
- Take it regularly every day, unless it is meant to be taken only when required
(find ways to remember e.g. leave the pack by your bed, in the kitchen, next to your toothbrush, in your car if you have one, next to the TV or computer, but don’t forget to keep them out of the sight and reach of children)
- Although medicines can help most people’s symptoms, they are not always the only answer. Please see our website for ideas for self-help, and help from others

A handy chart to help you compare the medicines to help the symptoms of social anxiety

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Medicine	Usual dose	How we think it might work (probably)	How long it takes to work	Some of the main side effects *					How long you could or should take it for	How to stop it
				Drowsiness	Weight gain	Nausea	Dry mouth, blurred vision	Sexual problems		
Main medicines (licensed or which are proven to help)										
Escitalopram <i>- other SSRIs may be effective, but unlicensed</i>	10mg a day	Boosts serotonin	Takes at least 12 weeks for full effect but may begin to feel better after a few weeks	●	●	●●●	●	●●●	May need to take for at least six months or more or the symptoms may come back.	Should be no great problem but slowly over a week or two is a good idea
Paroxetine <i>- other SSRIs may be effective, but are not licensed</i>	20mg a day			●	●	●●●	●	●●●		Should be stopped slowly over several weeks
Other SSRIs e.g. fluoxetine, citalopram and sertraline	Fluoxetine & citalopram 20mg a day. Sertraline 50mg a day			●	●	●●●	●	●●●		Should be no great problem but slowly over a week or two is a good idea
Venlafaxine	75-150mg a day			●	●	●●●	●●	●●●		Should be stopped slowly over several weeks
Other medicines (usually only where the main medicines have not worked or as an add-on)										
Benzodiazepines	Lorazepam up to 4mg a day	Boosts GABA, the brain's natural calming messenger	Quick, can be a few hours or less	●●●	0	0	0	0	Best just used for short-term help when needed, rather than regularly	If taken regularly every day should probably be stopped slowly over a couple of weeks
Beta-blockers e.g. propranolol or oxprenolol	Up to 120mg a day, usually much less	Slows the heart, reduces tremor	Should get some effect in a few hours or so	0	0	0	0	0	Often just used as an "if needed" medicine	Should be stopped slowly if taken for more than a few months