

## Mirtazapine May Treat Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a common and debilitating condition that may occur after a frightening event. Individuals with PTSD have usually lived through an incident involving serious injury or the threat of death to themselves or others, or the actual death of other people. Survivors of natural disasters, car accidents, violent crimes (including sexual assault), or war combat commonly experience PTSD. People with PTSD may suffer from flashbacks to the event. They sleep poorly and frequently have nightmares. They avoid certain behaviors and environments that might bring back memories of the traumatic event.

Drug treatment for PTSD usually involves antidepressants. Antidepressants that are selective serotonin-reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), such as fluoxetine (Prozac), citalopram (Celexa), and sertraline (Zoloft), are used most often. But SSRIs do not work for everyone, and experimental trials with different medications may be necessary for some patients.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

American Academy of Family Physicians  
<http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/common/mentalhealth/anxiety/624.printerview.html>

National Institute of Mental Health  
[www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-easy-to-read/index.shtml](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-easy-to-read/index.shtml)

National Library of Medicine  
[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/posttraumaticstressdisorder.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/posttraumaticstressdisorder.html)



Mirtazapine (Remeron) is an antidepressant medication that works differently from the SSRIs. Mirtazapine blocks the actions of several different brain chemicals, including serotonin and norepinephrine. The drug is also associated with drowsiness, and this side effect might be especially helpful for individuals with PTSD since they have difficulty sleeping.

To study mirtazapine in individuals with PTSD, 17 war veterans with the condition were enrolled into a clinical trial. All of the veterans knew that they were taking the medication (there was no placebo group receiving an inactive pill). Doses ranged from 15 mg to 45 mg. The drug was taken at night for 3 months.

At the end of 90 days, 13 individuals had completed the study. Overall, 10 of 13 individuals experienced a decrease in PTSD symptoms. However, they all also experienced weight gain during the study. Some people gained a large amount of weight—one individual gained nearly

20 pounds. In addition, one study participant had a large increase in blood sugar and was diagnosed with diabetes. Other side effects were the ones expected; these included sleepiness and constipation.

Based upon the results from this very small study, it is possible that some people with PTSD

may benefit from mirtazapine. If you suffer from PTSD and have not gotten relief with other medications, you may want to talk to your doctor about mirtazapine. If you and your healthcare provider decide to try the drug, it is important to have your weight and blood sugar levels checked regularly.