

Dangerous drug interactions

There are risks if SSRIs are taken with other antidepressants including MAOIs (or within two weeks of stopping MAOIs). It's essential to have at least a one-week gap after stopping SSRIs before starting MAOIs (with fluoxetine, at least five weeks and for paroxetine and sertraline at least two weeks).

There is evidence of significant adverse interaction between SSRIs and tricyclic antidepressants. All currently available SSRIs (except, perhaps, citalopram) may raise the blood levels of tricyclics, and therefore increase the risk of serious side effects. Such interactions may occur when drugs are changed from an SSRI to a tricyclic, and this should therefore be done with caution, starting with a low dose of tricyclic and increasing gradually.

If SSRIs are given with other antidepressants including MAOIs, tryptophan and lithium, there is a risk of serotonin syndrome developing. This is serious and potentially fatal. The symptoms are: hyperthermia (high temperature), tremor and convulsions (fits), agitation and muscle spasms.

There are possible hazards if SSRIs and antipsychotic drugs are prescribed together; in particular: fluoxetine with haloperidol; and fluvoxamine with clozapine. Some SSRIs may increase levels of carbamazepine with risk of carbamazepine levels rising to toxic levels. Check with your doctor or pharmacist for further information if you are prescribed drugs together, or closely following one another, in case of possible interactions