

# WDDTY

## Antidepressants: The baddest of the bad is revealed

Antidepressants are a family of drugs that are bad and dangerous to know – and now researchers have named Effexor (venlafaxine) as the baddest of the bad. Patients are much more likely to attempt suicide while taking Effexor than any of the other antidepressants, a new study has found.

The news comes as no surprise to those who've already been exposed to the drug. It's considered to be one of the most powerful antidepressants, and one of the hardest to tolerate. In fact, around 19 per cent of patients stop taking the drug early because they can't stand the side effects, which include anxiety, sexual dysfunction, weight gain, high blood pressure and thyroid depression. One patient even reported a sudden change of hair colour.

They are the lucky ones. Once over the initial hurdles of life-destroying side effects, withdrawal symptoms are so severe that it's almost impossible to stop taking the drug.

Thousands of patients who signed a petition to the drug's manufacturer, Wyeth-Ayerst, claim the drug company knew about the side effects and the withdrawal problems, but failed to properly disclose the facts.

Most of the problems were slowly drip-fed into the public arena over a period of eight years after the drug was first licensed, they say.

Now the last piece of the jigsaw has been revealed. Researchers from RTI Health Solutions at Manchester Science Park analysed the safety records of 219,088 patients from the UK who were taking an antidepressant between 1995 and 2005. Patients taking Effexor were nearly three times as likely to attempt suicide compared with a patient taking another antidepressant, including Prozac (fluoxetine).

(Source: British Medical Journal, 2007; 334: 242-5).

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