

# ask Dr Roshan Jain

Your *mental and emotional health* questions answered

**Q** I am 25 years old, married and working as an IT professional. About 12 months ago, I suffered from depression due to work stress. Upon consultation with a psychiatrist, I was treated with antidepressant - Escitalopram. After taking it for two months, I recovered and have been stable and well for the past eight months, and now wish to stop medication. But I fear that depression might recur upon discontinuing tablets. Please advise.

There are no specific guidelines for the treatment duration of depression. It often depends on factors including family history of depression, personal character, coping mechanism, support network and stress. Other important factors include nature and degree of depressive episode, number of illness episodes and response to treatment. Duration of treatment is a clinical decision.

Practice-based evidence suggests that for the first episode one would need to take antidepressant for up to 5-6 months after clinical response to treatment. If an individual has remained symptom-free for the above duration, then attempts can be made to taper down the dose and stop. For those, with two or more episodes of depression, it is advisable to take the medicine between 12-24 months.

Individuals should receive required dose during maintenance phase (when they are stable and have minimal or no effects of depression) and medication must be reviewed regularly. Efforts must be made to wean off medication

following clinical consultation. You must see your psychiatrist before stopping the tablets. It will be advisable to continue consultation for monitoring your mood after discontinuing medicine, and restart should there be recurrence of depression.

Be aware of the early features of depressive illness, including loss of interest in activities, poor sleep and pervasive low mood that one cannot get out of despite efforts.

In the event of recurrence of depression after stopping tablets, restart medication as soon as possible for better response.

**Q** My 23-year-old son thinks that *hookah* smoking is less addictive and safer than smoking cigarettes. Please advise.

I am glad someone asked this question yet again! It's important to know that *hookah* smoking has been a social ritual for many people, shared with family, friends or co-workers. It has been used in rural areas for generations, but recently, has become an urban fad, especially among the younger generation. When other people light up, it is often natural for smokers and non-smokers to join them.

Many states have banned *hookah*

smoking, as it is unhealthy and more addictive than cigarettes. A cigarette smoker takes 8-12 puffs from each cigarette over a period of 5-7 minutes, with each puff delivering about 50-75 ml of smoke. This means they inhale 0.5 litre from a single cigarette. By contrast, *hookah* smokers inhale more often and for longer periods and inhale as much as a litre of smoke with each puff. And because a session can go on for half-an-hour or more, smokers take as many as 50 to 200 puffs per session. According to WHO, a *hookah* smoker could inhale the equivalent of 100 cigarettes or more, during a single session.

Nicotine content in cigarettes and *hookah* is one of the most addictive drugs known. Coming off it may be difficult but will ensure health and longevity. If you fail or refuse to give up smoking in all its forms then there are more than 50 per cent chances of you dying of smoke related illness.

Our doctors will answer all queries on emotional and mental health. Got mind trouble of your own? Drop us a mail at [bpositiveQA@apollolife.com](mailto:bpositiveQA@apollolife.com)

Or write to

BPositive magazine,  
Lifetime Wellness Rx International Ltd,  
5th Floor, Life Science Building,  
Apollo Health City, Jubilee Hills,  
Hyderabad-500033

**Dr Roshan Jain,**  
Senior Consultant Psychiatrist &  
De-addiction Specialist,  
Apollo Hospitals, Bangalore.