

BEYOND SEPTEMBER GUIDE

How to Find Medication That Works

Finding the right psychiatric medication is often a process, not a single prescription. Many people try more than one before something fits. That doesn't mean treatment is failing — it means your prescriber is tuning it. Here's how to be an active partner in that process.

Start with the right expectations

- Most antidepressants take **4–6 weeks** at a full dose before you can judge them. Feeling nothing at week two is normal, not proof it won't work.
- Side effects often show up before benefits do — and many fade in the first couple of weeks.
- If the first medication doesn't work or isn't tolerable, that is common. Trying another is a normal step, not a dead end.

Track what you're actually experiencing

Memory is unreliable when you feel awful. Keep a simple daily note: sleep hours, mood (1–10), side effects, and one sentence about the day. Bring it to appointments — it turns 'I don't know, I guess it's not working' into something your prescriber can act on.

Questions worth asking your prescriber

- What is this medication supposed to help with, and when should I expect to notice?
- What side effects are common, and which ones mean I should call you right away?
- What happens if this one doesn't work — what's our next step?
- Can we review everything I'm taking, including supplements and over-the-counter meds?
- Is pharmacogenetic (gene-based) testing an option to help guide choices?

The rules that keep you safe

- **Never stop abruptly.** Stopping many psychiatric medications suddenly can cause withdrawal effects and a return of symptoms. Always taper with your prescriber.
- **Say the hard things out loud.** If a medication makes you feel worse, more agitated, or brings new suicidal thoughts, contact your prescriber promptly — and call or text 988 anytime you need support between appointments.
- **One change at a time** where possible, so you can tell what's doing what.
- **Cost is a real barrier — say so.** Ask about generics, patient assistance programs, and lower-cost alternatives. Prescribers hear this every day.

Medication is one leg of the stool

For many people, medication works best combined with therapy, sleep, movement, and connection. If you're only getting a prescription and a 15-minute check-in, it's reasonable to ask about adding therapy or a referral.

If you don't have a prescriber or need help finding care, our independent companion resource FindSupportToday.com can help you search at your own pace.

Sources & further reading

- NIMH — Mental Health Medications: nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/mental-health-medications
- SAMHSA National Helpline (treatment referrals, free, 24/7): 1-800-662-4357 — samhsa.gov/find-help

Beyond September is an awareness and education initiative. This guide is general education — it is not medical, mental-health, or crisis care, and it is not a substitute for advice from a qualified professional. If you are struggling right now, call or text **988** or chat at 988lifeline.org. If you are in immediate danger, call **911**.