

What Should I Do: Medication or Exercise?

Good news: this is not an either/or question, and you don't have to figure it out alone.

What the evidence says

- **Exercise works.** Regular aerobic exercise has a real, measurable antidepressant effect — for mild-to-moderate depression it can rival medication in some studies.
- **Medication works.** Antidepressants help many people, especially with moderate-to-severe symptoms, and can make it possible to do the other things (like exercising) that feel impossible right now.
- **Together works best.** For many people, the strongest results come from combining medication, therapy, movement, sleep, and connection.

How to think about the choice

- **Severity matters.** If you're having suicidal thoughts, don't wait months to see if jogging fixes it — talk to a doctor or therapist now.
- **Start where you can.** If a walk is all you can do, that counts. If a pill a day is what you can commit to, that counts too.
- **Medication is adjustable, not a life sentence.** First choices don't always fit; prescribers expect to adjust.
- **Never stop a medication abruptly** — taper only with your prescriber.

Only a licensed prescriber can advise you on medication for your situation. This guide is education, not medical advice. Bring your questions — and this page, if it helps — to a doctor or psychiatrist.

In crisis or struggling? Call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, free, 24/7) · Chat at 988lifeline.org

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