

# When the dream - drug becomes a nightmare

**Depression can lead to addiction and to a dependency on prescription anti-depressants that is perhaps worse than the problem the pills are supposed to solve. EVA KUEHNEN investigates the effects of Seroxat.**



Stressed out, tired, weak and in the middle of your final exams. The last thing you need now is to feel ill or down. That's what Jamie thought, when she was 21, finishing her degree at University. Her doctor had a solution for her. A way out as easy as you'd dream it would be. A molecular shaped pill - Seroxat. Glad about the easy solution to her problems, Jamie started taking the dream-drug. And today she wishes she'd never had started with Seroxat.

Problems that might have been solved at first led to problems far more difficult than those she was struggling with before. About a year after she had started taking Seroxat, she ran out of her prescription and tried to live without the drug. Only then she realised how difficult it was. After the first day without the drug, she felt very anxious and panicky. She got sensations like electric shocks

'Remember that you can not become addicted to paroxetine (Seroxat).' That is what it says in the data sheet, which is inside of every packet of Seroxat. The company that produces Seroxat, GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), disputes that Seroxat makes you addicted. The British Medical Control Agency (MCA) also states: 'It is generally accepted that other features such as increase doses of the drug to produce the same effect and drug seeking behaviour are required for the diagnosis of dependence.' Jamie started with a dose of 20mg per day. After two years she went up to 40 mg per day. She has now got herself back down to 20 mg again.

The Committee on Safety on Medicines (CSM) as well as the Committee on Proprietary Medicinal Products (CPMP) say

'although reactions do occur ... these medicines do not cause addiction. However this issue is taken very seriously and continues to be monitored closely.' Applying these definitions, Seroxat should be a harmless drug.

So harmless that in Germany it is not admissible for kids under 18. Seroxat, (paroxetine) is an anti-depressant and belongs to the group of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRIs). They are designed to rise the level of serotonin in the brain, the body's natural antidepressant. Paxil, Prozac or Celexa also belong to this family of medications. They are mostly prescribed to treat depression, social anxiety, insomnia, shyness, natural sadness or post-traumatic stress disorder. They have always been marketed as safe medicines, which are supposed not to cause the dependence problems that emerged with older drugs such as Valium (diazepam). But now more and more people complain about the heavy side effects and withdrawal problems.

Jamie has tried to come off Seroxat many times. Weaning herself off slowly etc, but no method worked. She felt so miserable that it made her go back on the drug. She was not the only one. On the net, she found many web-sites that provided self-help communities for those troubled by their treatments. Recently a large anti-SSRIs campaign developed on the Internet.

But not all patients suffer side effects. A lot of people benefit from Seroxat with it changing their lives in a positive way. It is just the large number of side effects that users need to be aware of before taking Seroxat. There are many other paroxetines that have fewer side effects, or with side effects which have more known about them. Seroxat was licensed for the British market twelve years

ago, in 1990. That is not a long time ago. About 20 % of the people who start taking the drug can't deal with the side effects and have to stop taking it. These side effects include panic attacks, difficulty breathing and swallowing or hallucinations, just like Jamie experienced.

When she told her doctor about it, she was told that it was her, and not the drug that caused the side effects. The GP told her to stay on the drug.

Today it is very common to treat mental illnesses with rather more expensive psychotherapy. If you do get stressed out or feel depressed there are a couple of other ways to deal with it. Yoga or other relaxing sports for example. And there are also a couple of homeopathic products available, which have a natural basis. But if you are already taking SSRIs and you want to come off, do talk to your doctor first. It is important that when stopping the treatment it is done slowly and that the dose is decreased bit by bit.

Today, four years later, Jamie still takes Seroxat. If only it would be as easy as coming off penicillin, she'd do it right away. Since it is not, at least not for her and many other patients, she has to deal with it. But she still wants to try, bit by bit.

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#### useful web sites

[www.counselling.co.uk](http://www.counselling.co.uk) (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy )  
[www.mdf.org.uk](http://www.mdf.org.uk) (Manic Depression Fellowship)  
[www.bcp.org.uk](http://www.bcp.org.uk) (British Confederation of Psychotherapists)  
[www.gmc-uk.org](http://www.gmc-uk.org) (General Medical Council)  
[www.bps.org.uk](http://www.bps.org.uk) (British Psychological Society)  
[www.bcma.co.uk](http://www.bcma.co.uk) (British Complementary Medicine Association)  
[www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk) (Mental Health Foundation)  
[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) (NHS Direct Online)  
[www.depressionalliance.org](http://www.depressionalliance.org)  
[www.healingwell.com](http://www.healingwell.com)

