

PE1651/BBBB

Anonymous submission of 12 January 2018

I was given Prozac in approximately 1996 by a primary care physician. In 1998, I met with a psychologist to help me work through childhood trauma. Within months, the psychologist released me from his care, and into the care of a psychiatrist. I was given Effexor, which was quickly ramped up to 450 mg per day. Basically, I couldn't feel a thing other than anxiety, so 2mg of klonopin was added.

What followed was more than 20 years of the numbing effect of the SNRI/benzo combination. I stayed on these drugs until I was able to completely taper off the Effexor in April 2017. My dose for most of that time was 300-375mg...my doctor always wanting me to increase the dose and me constantly advocating for a lower dose.

I was never informed of any type of discontinuation syndrome by my psychiatrist or any other medical provider. I remember reading the insert for Effexor provided by the pharmacy. I thought I was reading all the information. It wasn't until years later that I discovered the pharmacy insert was only a "summary" of the FDA package insert.

At one point I started to lower my dose with the goal of getting off the meds to start a family. I was working with a fertility expert who suggested I consider the possible outcomes of carrying a baby to term while on the drugs. I ended up in a psychiatric hospital due to suicidal ideation. I was told the symptoms I was experiencing were a result of my "underlying mental illness". It was never suggested that the increase in symptoms might be a result of "discontinuation syndrome". I never had children, as I was concerned about causing harm to a little one. This is my biggest regret in relation to these drugs.

More recently, I started doing research on psychiatric drugs. I realized the drugs had become paradoxical, and were causing the symptoms they were meant to resolve. I tried to talk to my psychiatrist about what I was learning, and his response was to stop believing everything I read on the internet. If I didn't like my treatment, I was welcome to find another doctor.

I switched my care to my primary care physician. I have to give credit to this doctor, as he help me against his best instincts. He felt I was putting myself through too much distress when I could maintain the status quo. Unfortunately, the status quo was no longer tolerable. Increased depression and anxiety, sexual dysfunction and raising A1C (pre-diabetic) numbers made me realize I wanted to be free of the drugs before I needed additional pharmaceutical drugs with more side effects and interactions. I didn't want to become a statistic of early death caused by polydrugging.

It took me 30 months to taper from 300 mg Effexor. Once I got below 20mg I started to feel better. The depression and anxiety started to lift. I am now 9 months off

Effexor and starting to feel like myself again. I still take 0.25mg of klonopin and plan to discontinue that next month – my final taper.

Living through the withdrawal process itself was absolute horror. In closing, I will list some of the more pronounced symptoms I experienced throughout my 30 month taper off Effexor. Be clear, most of these symptoms were experienced on a daily basis as I implemented every coping strategy I had to stay alive:

Vertigo, Confusion, Internal tremor, Depersonalization, Derealization, Social phobia, Akathisia, Anxiety, Depression, Exhaustion, Brain zaps, Rage events, Sleep disturbances, Inability to form words, Inability to distinguish words, Inability to manage normal sensory input, Numbness/tingling, Suicidal thoughts, Itching, Joint and muscle pain, Chills.