

PE1651/YYYY

Lynne Smith submission of 31 January 2018

I started taking Citalopram in 2006 (for depression and insomnia, as far as I can remember, no anxiety attacks, no panic attacks) and then off and on until 2011 when I went back on it for anxious feelings. Reinstating relieved those symptoms.

I noticed, though, that during 2011 and 2012 I was very tired most of the time and felt less energetic or strong as I had previously. Because of personal circumstances (caring for my mother and her eventual death in 2012) I thought that this could be the cause of the tiredness.

In 2013 I was still dogged by tiredness and a lot of yawning and reported it to my doctor. The doctor suggested trying another anti-depressant. From early 2013-mid 2014, I was taken through a series of meds: Sertraline, Effexor, Fluoxetine and Mirtazapine.

From Effexor on, I had intolerable side effects and by the time I got to the Mirtazapine I was experiencing horrific insomnia, anxiety, black circles under eyes, exhaustion, dizziness, panic attack, headaches, sore eyes and hot face. I could barely sit in a room with other people and participate in meetings at work and I became extra-sensitive to noises and crowds. At one point I was so ill with these symptoms I was taken to an emergency doctor and given Lorazepam, which calmed me down.

In July 2014 I stopped the Mirtazapine cold turkey as I couldn't continue to take them because of the monumental the side-effects. I didn't know about withdrawal effects then and went through a frightening acute withdrawal, which felt like I was being fried inside, hooked up to an electric circuit. The acute symptoms stopped after a few days and I thought I had weathered the storm. But then I began to have symptoms - dizziness, nausea, anxiety and more - that came intermittently in waves of varying severity.

By this time I was searching the internet and discovered that others were experiencing what was happening to me. I learned about "waves" and "windows" and that, with time, the windows of "normal-ness" would become more than the waves of symptoms. I ventured on, med-free, dealing with the symptoms, still managing to work but feeling pretty bad much of the time. I even had a period when I had such increased need to urinate, I could barely travel the hour it took to get home without stopping to find a toilet. I reported all these symptoms over this time to my Dr.

In February 2016, after having bad anxiety attacks, I went to my doctor and, though I didn't really want to start taking these drugs again, agreed to reinstate on Fluoxetine, in the hope that it would stabilise me. The Dr saw these symptoms as a resurgence of the depression (though I'd never had anxiety or panic attacks before starting with Citalopram in 2006) and dismissed the idea that I was having long-term post withdrawal effects. The Fluoxetine experience was dreadful - bad gastro effects, insomnia, anxiety etc.. In July 2016 I did a fast-ish taper off under the Dr's supervision.

I was anti-depressant med free from July 2016 - February 2017.

Life was difficult and uncomfortable - symptoms that persisted during this time were - dizziness, unsteady on feet, blood rush from the head on standing (near fainting), sore stomach (hollow, very hungry feeling), gripey wind, heart palpitations, tiredness/exhaustion, tension, on edge, frightening anxiety episodes, sensitivity to noise, other people and stress, tinnitus, dry mouth and sore eyes. But I managed to keep working and given what I'd found out through the internet, I saw them as part of the process of my system restoring itself.

Over xmas 2016 I had a severe panic attack when caught in a traffic jam and then in January 2017 I had another severe panic attack after a run. Again, panic attacks were not part of my "condition" when I first started with Citalopram in 2006. In January 2017 I reported a list of these symptoms to my Dr, who suggested she would research any conditions that would cause these symptoms. I heard nothing back from her.

In late January, after the panic attack, my body "collapsed" on me. One day I woke up and felt very dizzy, shaky and wobbly-legged and nauseous, finding walking very difficult.

Since then, I've experienced intense suicidal anxiety and insomnia, continued weak-feeling legs (I use walking sticks to help), dizziness, increased frequency of urination and a burning bladder, increased tinnitus. It really seems like there have been so many symptoms it's hard to write them all down.

I haven't been able to work full-time, have relied on the generous help from friends to go shopping with me or take me to appointments or out for walks and have been unable to drive many times through fear of fainting.

In February 2017 I was referred to a Psychiatrist who, after a 20 minute consultation, decided that my condition was due to missing my mum. I had taken in a written account of the cycle of anti-depressants in 2013-2014 and the symptoms since then and asked if the recent events could be the result of adverse effects from that period, given that it all started for me from that point. He flatly dismissed it as a cause. He told me that at first he thought I had a psycho-social depression but later on decided that I had a biological depression because of my gait.

Since February 2017, I have been on Escitalopram (up to 10mg) and Nortriptyline (up to 90mg) with benzodiazepines to help with the suicidal anxiety. These have helped to even things out a bit but I still have wobbly, weak legs and dizzy feelings, along with low-level anxiety. Both the doctor and psychiatrist have psychologised the weak, wobbly legs as somatic manifestations of the "depression" but I know something is physically amiss.

In June 2017, the psychiatrist tried me on Lithium, which produced instant insomnia, headaches, utter dryness and more wobbly legs. I stopped within a week. The psychiatrist suggested that I stay on the original drugs until I stabilise, then look at whether more drugs are added (eg. anti-psychotics) or reinstate talk therapy to get

down to the “root” of what is causing this “major depression”. I am more than frustrated that this is how my situation is being analysed and fearful of further medication, or the ECT that the psychiatrist has brought into the conversation as a possible intervention.

Life has turned upside down for me, I feel as though I have been taken to an alien planet. From a woman who walked five-hour hikes, did gym sessions and yoga (when the symptoms permitted), I am now walking with sticks to help me and feel muscle tiredness at low levels of exertion. I am working part-time from home and go onto the office when I can, though it is utterly tiring and nerve-racking due to the weak, wobbly legs. I turned 60 this year and I fear that the drugs have damaged me to a point where there is no return to the me I used to be. I also have the withdrawal from the benzodiazepines to go through.

Despite the positive messages I, my friends and the Drs give me, I am living with the uncertainty that I will recover to a “normal” life of full-time work, social activities and independence. The financial and social implications are frightening.