

Citalopram

Celexa, an antidepressant called an SSRI

Citalopram lifts low mood a little at a time, so the weeks ahead start to feel possible again.

WHAT IT TREATS

Depression, anxiety

HOW YOU TAKE IT

Once daily, any food

WHEN IT WORKS

1-2 weeks; fuller by 6-8

HABIT FORMING

No

⚠️ IMPORTANT SAFETY WARNING

Antidepressants can raise the risk of suicidal thoughts in people under **25**, mostly in the first weeks or after a dose change. Tell someone right away and call your prescriber. Do not stop the medicine on your own.

🕒 WHAT THIS MEDICINE DOES

- **Citalopram** is an antidepressant. It helps your brain hold on to serotonin, a chemical that steadies mood and worry.
- It is approved for depression, and prescribers also use it for panic, constant worry, and social anxiety.
- It mixes well with other medicines, which is why it is often chosen for people already taking several prescriptions.
- It is not habit forming and it does not blunt your feelings. It works quietly in the background every single day.

🕒 HOW TO TAKE IT

- Take it once a day at the same time. Morning or evening both work, so pick the one you will actually stick to.
- You can take it with or without food. If your stomach protests in the first week, take it with a meal instead.
- There is a daily maximum for this medicine, which your prescriber sets. Never raise your own dose to feel better faster.
- If you miss a dose, take it when you remember that day. If it is nearly time for the next one, skip it. Never double up.
- Store it at room temperature and away from damp. Refill a few days early so you never run out over a weekend.

📈 WHAT TO EXPECT

- Sleep, appetite, and energy tend to improve first, in about **1 to 2 weeks**. Mood and interest usually follow later.
- Give it **4 to 6 weeks** at a steady dose before you judge it. The fullest benefit can take 8 to 12 weeks.
- Side effects often show up before the benefit does. That gap is the single most common reason people quit too early.
- Working is usually undramatic: you sleep, you eat, the day stops feeling like a wall. Others often notice before you do.

💡 COMMON SIDE EFFECTS

- Nausea is common in the first week or two. Take it with food and eat smaller, plainer meals until it eases off.
- Dry mouth is common. Sip water, chew sugar-free gum, and see your dentist regularly, since dry mouth invites cavities.
- Sleep may go either way at first, drowsy or wide awake. Ask your prescriber about changing what time you take it.
- Sexual side effects are common: less desire, delayed orgasm, or less sensation. Say so, because there are real fixes.
- Extra sweating and a fine hand tremor can happen. Cutting caffeine and dressing in layers takes the edge off.
- Weight usually stays close to steady on **citalopram**, but tell your prescriber if it moves in either direction.

⚠️ CALL YOUR PRESCRIBER OR GET HELP RIGHT AWAY IF

- New or worse thoughts of suicide, especially early or after a dose change: call or text **988** now and tell someone today.
- Call **911** for fainting, a pounding or fluttering heartbeat, or chest pain. This medicine can change heart rhythm.
- Call **911** for agitation with fever, stiff muscles, or twitching. That can mean too much serotonin in your system.
- Call your prescriber for new confusion or unsteadiness, especially in an older adult. Salt levels are easy to check.

🚫 WHAT TO AVOID

- Skip alcohol, especially early on. It works against the medicine and makes both sleep and low mood worse.
- Ask before any new medicine, herb, or supplement. St. John's wort, tramadol, and migraine triptans are the big ones.
- Tell your prescriber about heartburn pills like omeprazole. They raise **citalopram** levels and change your safe dose.
- Check before regular ibuprofen, naproxen, or aspirin. Together they raise your chance of stomach bleeding.
- Tell your prescriber if you are pregnant, nursing, or planning to be. That is a choice to weigh together, not alone.

🛑 STOPPING IT SAFELY

- Never stop on your own, even when you feel great. Feeling well is the medicine working, not proof you are finished with it.
- Stopping suddenly can bring dizziness, electric-shock feelings, irritability, and trouble sleeping. A slow taper prevents it.
- Your prescriber will step the dose down over **2 to 4 weeks** or longer, sometimes using the liquid for small drops.
- Most people stay on it at least **6 to 12 months** after they feel well. Stopping early is the top reason symptoms return.

❓ QUESTIONS TO ASK

- How long should I give this before we decide whether it is working?
- Do I need a heart tracing before or after we change my dose?
- What can we try if the sexual side effects do not go away on their own?
- Who do I call after hours if I start feeling worse instead of better?

Where this information comes from

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. (2025). *Talk to someone now*. <https://988lifeline.org/>

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NOTE

Sources are listed in APA 7th edition style. This handout is general information about a medicine, not medical advice, and it does not replace the instructions from your own prescriber or pharmacist. Never start, change, or stop a medicine on your own. If you think you are having a serious reaction, call your prescriber; if you cannot breathe, cannot stay awake, or are thinking of harming yourself, call 911 or 988 right away.