

Table 5.1 THE HALF-LIVES, ELIMINATION TIMES, AND TYPICAL ONSET OF WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS AFTER STOPPING ANTIDEPRESSANTS

Antidepressant	Half-Life	90% Eliminated	Typical Onset of Withdrawal
Effexor	5 hours	1 day	Day 1-2
Effexor XR	5 hours	1 day	Day 1-2
Cymbalta	12 hours	2.5 days	Day 2-3
Luvox	15.6 hours	3.3 days	Day 2-3
Serzone	11-24 hours	3.6 days	Day 2-3
Paxil CR	15-20 hours	3.6 days	Day 2-3
Paxil	21 hours	4.4 days	Day 2-3
Wellbutrin	21 hours	4.4 days	Day 2-3
Wellbutrin SR Wellbutrin XL	21 hours	4.4 days	Day 2-3
Zoloft	26 hours	5.4 days	Day 3-4
Lexapro	27-32 hours	6.1 days	Day 3-5
Remeron	20-40 hours	6.3 days	Day 3-5
Celexa	35 hours	7.3 days	Day 3-6
Prozac	4-6 days	25 days	2-3 weeks

release mechanism affects how the antidepressant is released from the pill into the stomach and blood stream. But slow release determines how quickly or slowly an antidepressant *enters* the body; rather than how quickly or slowly the drug *washes out* when it is stopped or the dose is lowered.

In Table 5.1, Prozac is set off from the other antidepressants because it has a much longer half-life, four to six days. It takes more than three weeks for 90 percent of Prozac to be eliminated from the body. Because Prozac has this slow, built-in taper, withdrawal reactions are less common with Prozac than other antidepressants.

The frequency with which antidepressants cause withdrawal reac-

tions correlates with how short their half-lives are. Table 5.2 shows the results of a pair of studies done at the Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School investigating the frequency of withdrawal reactions with Effexor, Paxil, Zoloft, and Prozac.¹² Effexor causes withdrawal reactions in an extremely high percentage of patients, 78 percent. Paxil and Zoloft are close behind with 66 and 60 percent of patients, respectively. Prozac causes withdrawal reactions in 14 percent of patients. Notice in Table 5.2 that the rank order of frequency of withdrawal reactions correlates with the half-lives of these antidepressants. That is, the shorter-acting antidepressants cause more withdrawal symptoms. This is because the frequency with which antidepressants cause withdrawal reactions correlates with how quickly they wash out of the body.

Effexor is the worst offender in terms of the lightning speed with which it can cause withdrawal reactions. Patients who miss their morning dose of Effexor can find themselves in the throes of withdrawal reactions by late morning.¹³ Patients who miss their evening dose can be awoken in the middle of the night by withdrawal symptoms.¹⁴ Some patients report feeling “held hostage” by their Effexor dose; if they fail to take it like clockwork they can be in withdrawal within an hour or two of a missed dose.

Prozac causes withdrawal symptoms in 14 percent of patients, in marked contrast to the much higher rates for the shorter-acting antidepressants. But, 14 percent of patients is still quite a lot. A side effect that occurs in more than 1 percent of patients is officially considered a frequent side effect.¹⁵ One of the big surprises in the large-scale, systematic studies of antidepressant withdrawal reactions done in the mid- to late-1990s is that antidepressant withdrawal reactions are *not* rare with

Table 5.2 FREQUENCY OF ANTIDEPRESSANT WITHDRAWAL REACTIONS

ANTIDEPRESSANT	HALF-LIFE	FREQUENCY OF WITHDRAWAL REACTIONS
Effexor	5 hours	78%
Paxil	21 hours	66%
Zoloft	26 hours	60%
Prozac	4–6 days	14%