

# Post-Prozac Nation: The Science and History of Treating Depression

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## *The New York Times:*

Few medicines, in the history of pharmaceuticals, have been greeted with as much exultation as a green-and-white pill containing 20 milligrams of fluoxetine hydrochloride — the chemical we know as Prozac. In her 1994 book “Prozac Nation,” Elizabeth Wurtzel wrote of a nearly transcendental experience on the drug. Before she began treatment with antidepressants, she was living in “a computer program of total negativity . . . an absence of affect, absence of feeling, absence of response, absence of interest.” She floated from one “suicidal reverie” to the next. Yet, just a few weeks after starting Prozac, her life was transformed. “One morning I woke up and really did want to live. . . . It was as if the miasma of depression had lifted off me, in the same way that the fog in San Francisco rises as the day wears on. Was it the Prozac? No doubt.”

Like Wurtzel, millions of Americans embraced antidepressants. In 1988, a year after the Food and Drug Administration approved Prozac, 2,469,000 prescriptions for it were dispensed in America. By 2002, that number had risen to 33,320,000. By 2008, antidepressants were the third-most-common prescription drug taken in America.

Fast forward to 2012 and the same antidepressants that inspired such enthusiasm have become the new villains of modern psychopharmacology — overhyped, overprescribed chemicals, symptomatic of a pill-happy culture searching for quick fixes for complex mental problems. In “The Emperor’s New Drugs,” the psychologist Irving Kirsch asserted that antidepressants work no better than sugar pills and that the clinical effectiveness of the drugs is, largely, a myth. If the lodestone book of the 1990s was Peter Kramer’s near-ecstatic testimonial, “Listening to Prozac,” then the book of the 2000s is David Healy’s “Let Them Eat Prozac: The Unhealthy Relationship Between the Pharmaceutical Industry and Depression.”

Read the whole story: [The New York Times](#)