

DAN DOC

MEDICAL LINE



Dr. John Parker

Q: *Dear Dan team,*

I wonder if you can help me with a question. One of my valued clients is planning a Nitrox course with us in March. He is on a course of anti depressants, Aropax. Is there any repercussions or issues with diving Nitrox and these drugs. I would be grateful for your advice.

A: This diver of unknown age or dive experience is taking Aropax for depression. There is no mention of the dose or how long he has been on it, nor whether the symptoms of depression have been eased.

The question is, is it safe to dive breathing Nitrox when taking this drug? The simple answer is that it is not known.

Aropax, or paroxetine by its generic name, is a “Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor” or SSRI for short. It is commonly used in the treatment of depression, obsessive/ compulsive disorders and panic attacks. It is thought to act by

increasing the levels of serotonin in the brain.

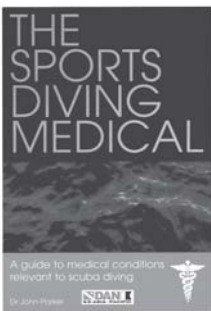
I presume this diver is diving safely on air and has been for a while. (I have had letters from numerous divers on SSRI drugs telling me they have no problems diving on air, but this does not make real data).

The difference between air and nitrox is that there is less nitrogen in the mix and more oxygen. Aropax does not aggravate the effects of alcohol and does not seem to aggravate nitrogen narcosis. On nitrox this danger is reduced.

The question begs, could the increased concentrations of oxygen have any effect? There are indications that pseudoephedrine (commonly called Sudafed), probably the most taken drug whilst scuba diving, may be dangerous when diving on Nitrox as its effects on the (sympathetic) nervous system may increase the danger of oxygen toxicity and having convulsions underwater. There have been several suspicious deaths to suggest this. Aropax does not have similar effects on the nervous system so this is probably not relevant. It does have some weak anti-cholinergic effects but this should not be enhanced by the increased oxygen levels.

So the answer is that I do not know. There is just no data to give any indication. Theoretically there seems to be no special effect, but this is only theory.

.... *John Parker*



A very accessible, readable and yet comprehensive guide to medical conditions relevant to recreational scuba diving,

Available from DAN SEAP

Read Dr. Parker's poetry at www.thepoetrydoctor.com

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