



INTRODUCTION TO WEANING PSYCHOTROPIC AGENTS

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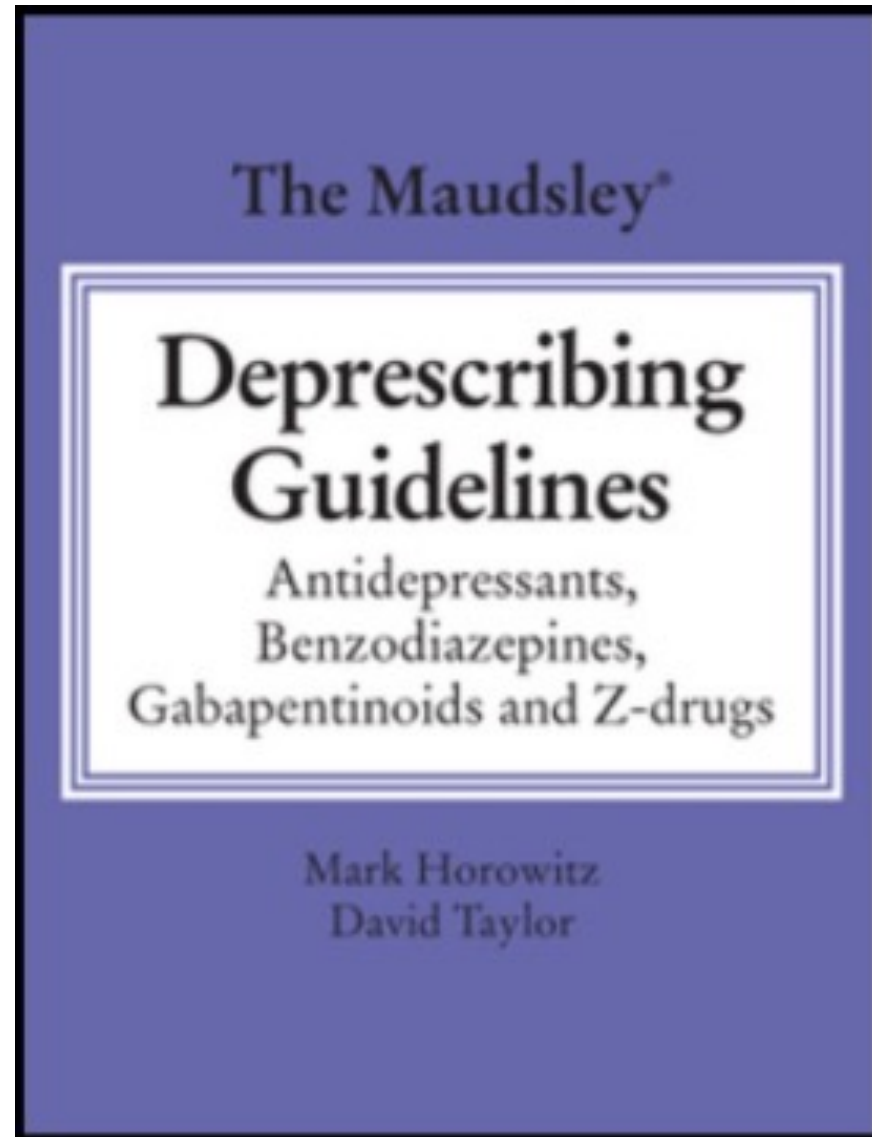


Beginner's Guide To Stopping Psychiatric Medications

with

Dr. Josef Witt-Doerring

Senior Fellow



Based on:

Horowitz, M.A., & Taylor, D.M. (2024).
The Maudsley Describing Guidelines:
Antidepressants, Benzodiazepines,
Gabapentinoids and Z-drugs.

Why Tapers Fail

- Lack of training for clinicians on taper design and execution
- Lack of training for clinicians on non-drug approaches to mental health problems
- Lack of access to non-drug professionals who can support your patients

Three Rules

- Remove the drug causing the worst side effects.
- Remove stimulants before sedatives.
- Remove any drugs that were recently started.

What Form of the Drug do I Need?

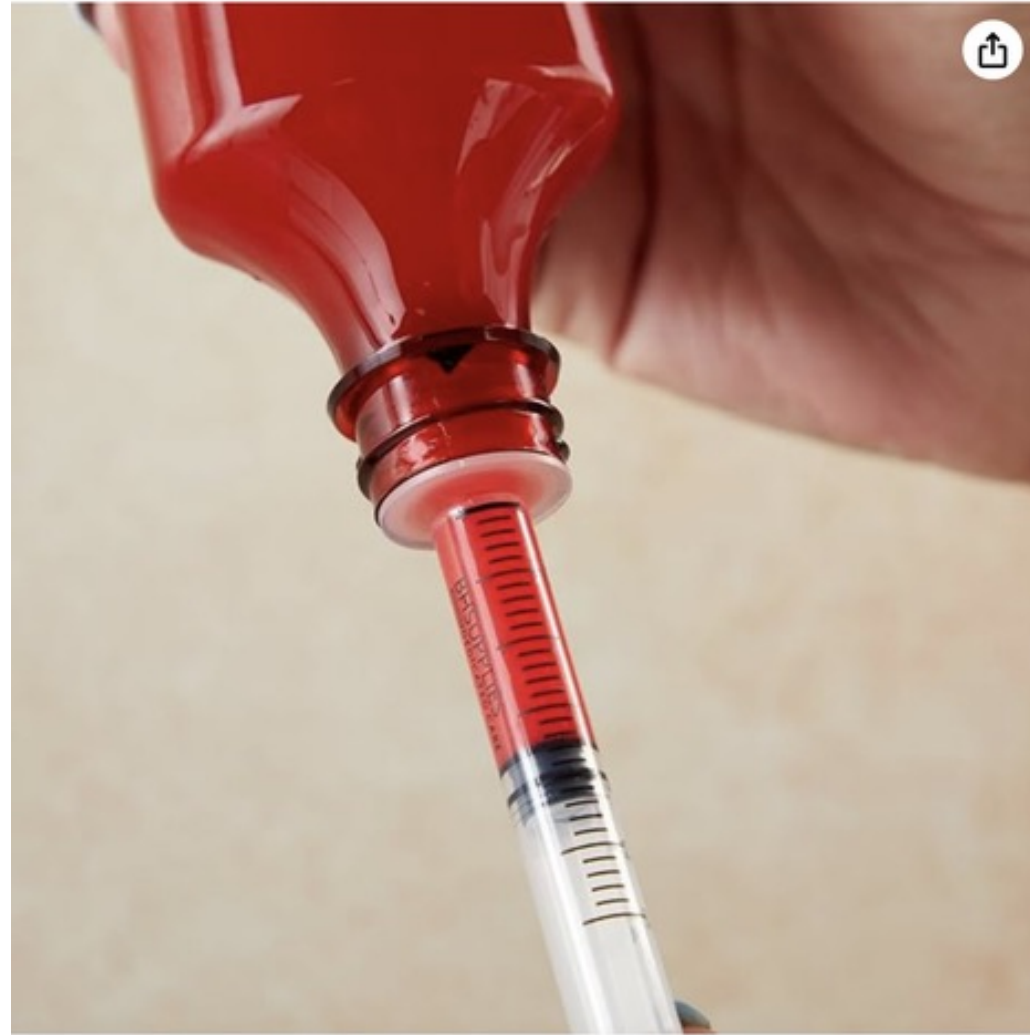
Drug Forms

- Psychiatric medications come in several forms:
- Immediate-release tablets
- Liquid formulations
- Extended-release capsules/tablets (e.g., Seroquel XR, Effexor XR, Wellbutrin XR)
- See bonus video: tapering Cymbalta, Pristiq, Invega, and long-acting injectables

Instant Release Capsules



Compounded Liquids



How to Get to The Right Drug Form for Tapering

If Using Tablets

- Instant Release Tablets → good to go
- Extended release capsules or LAI → switch to IR

If Tapering With Liquid (Highly Recommend)

- Find a local compounding pharmacy
- Have your doctor send a script for a liquid compound to the pharmacy

Calculations for Once a Day Dosing

- Create a compounded liquid prescription for DRUG ($X \text{ mg} = 1 \text{ mL}$)

Patient to take 1 mL daily. Dispense 35 mL for 30 days, with 5 mL added to account for residual medication loss in the syringe tip during dosing. Please include a 1 mL oral syringe and bottle adapter cap.

- Example (Patient taking Zoloft 200 mg once daily)

Create a compounded liquid prescription for sertraline ($200 \text{ mg} = 1 \text{ mL}$).

Patient to take 1 mL daily. Dispense 35 mL for 30 days, with 5 mL added to account for residual medication loss in the syringe tip during dosing. Please include a 1 mL oral syringe and bottle adapter cap.



Bottle adapter allows medication to be drawn directly from the bottle, less mess



How to Make Your First Reduction

How to Pick the Initial Taper Speed

- Most people should start with 5–10% reductions per month.
- Exceptions include:
 - Severe side effects
 - Medication used for less than two months
 - Stimulants

Dry Cuts

- Weigh the tablet on a scale
- Remove 5% of the weight
- Repeat in 2–4 weeks



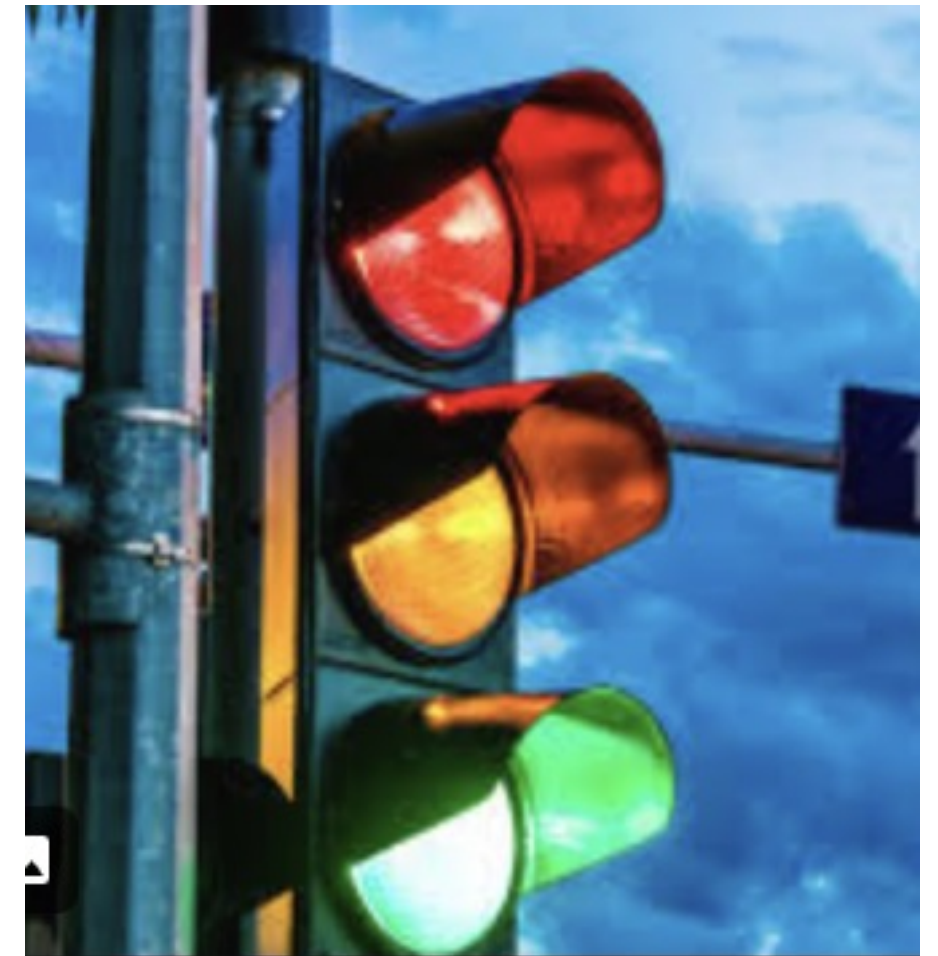
The Power of the 1 ml Syringe

- Draw up 1 mL of liquid
- Remove 5 lines; repeat in 2–4 weeks
- Benefit vs tablets: more precise and faster adjustments



The Traffic Light System

- Guides when to speed up, hold, slow, or updose
- Focus on listening to the patient's body
- Four stages: Light Green, Green, Yellow, Red



Light Green

- Withdrawal symptoms minimal or absent
- Patient feels stable or improved
- Action: Consider speeding taper by 5–10%, or shortening the reduction interval

Green

- Mild, tolerable symptoms
- No disruption to daily functioning
- Action: Maintain current taper rate

Yellow

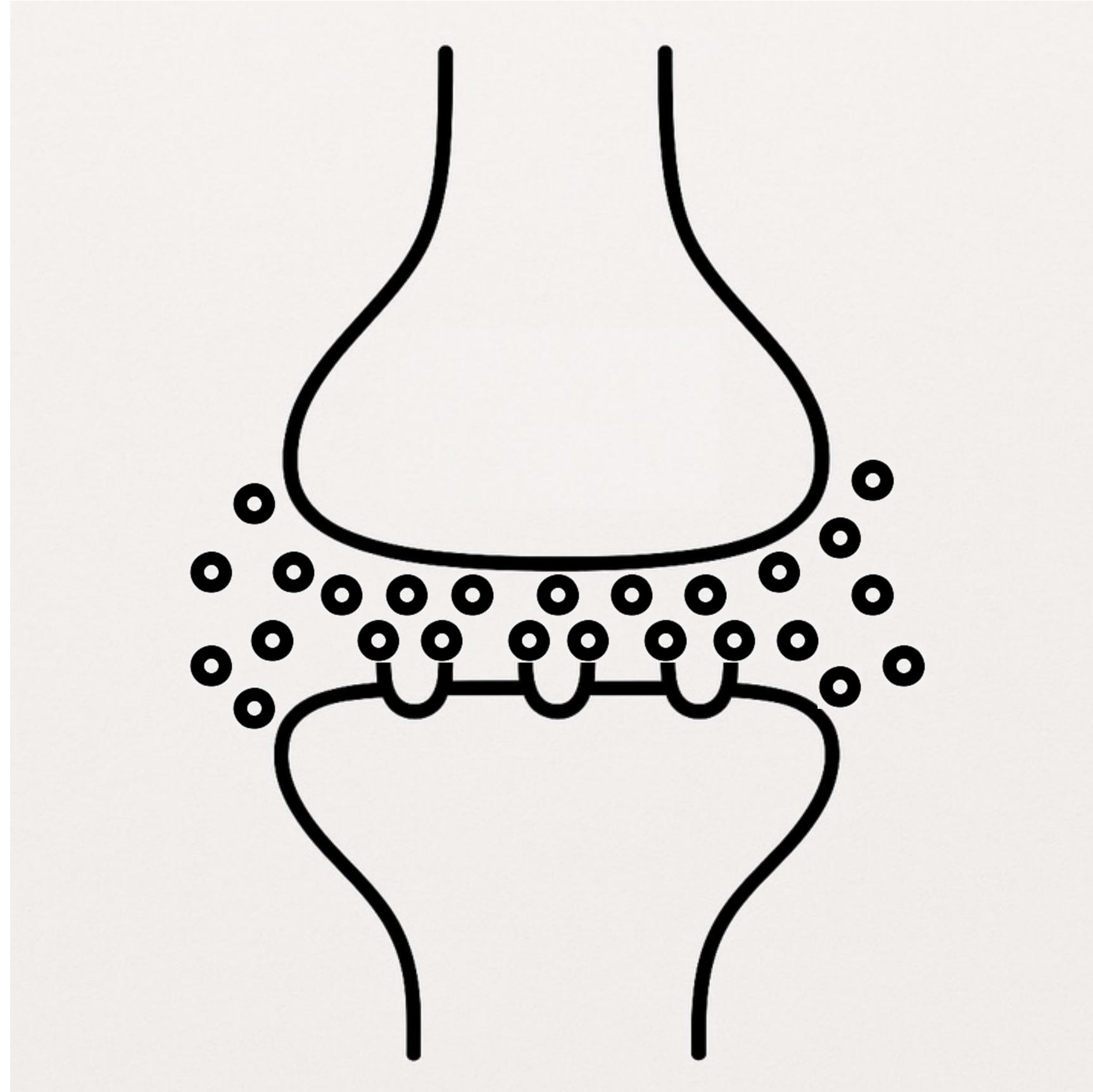
- Clear symptom worsening
- Increased distress
- Interferes with daily life but still manageable
- Action: Hold dose, then slow the taper

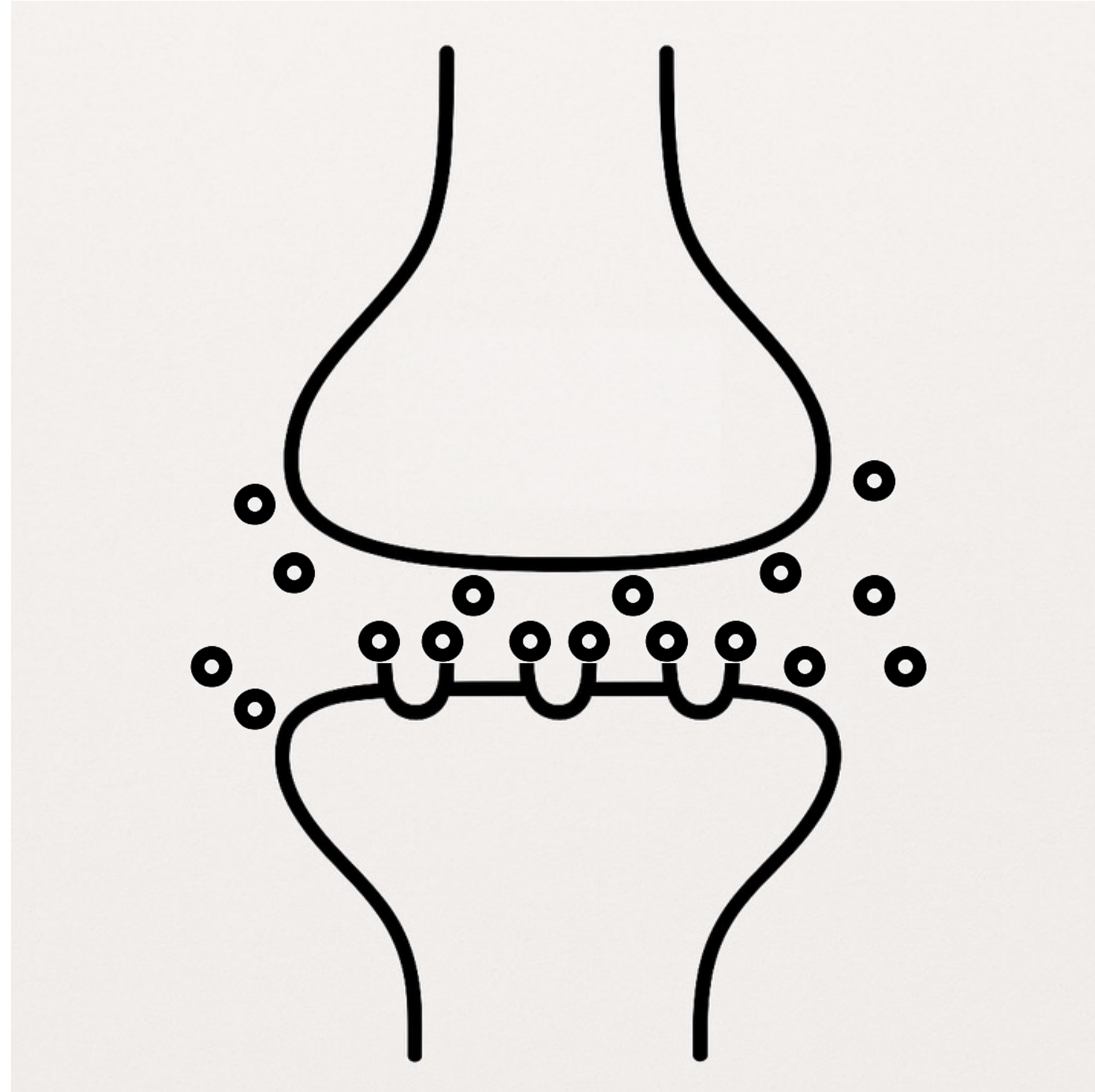
Red

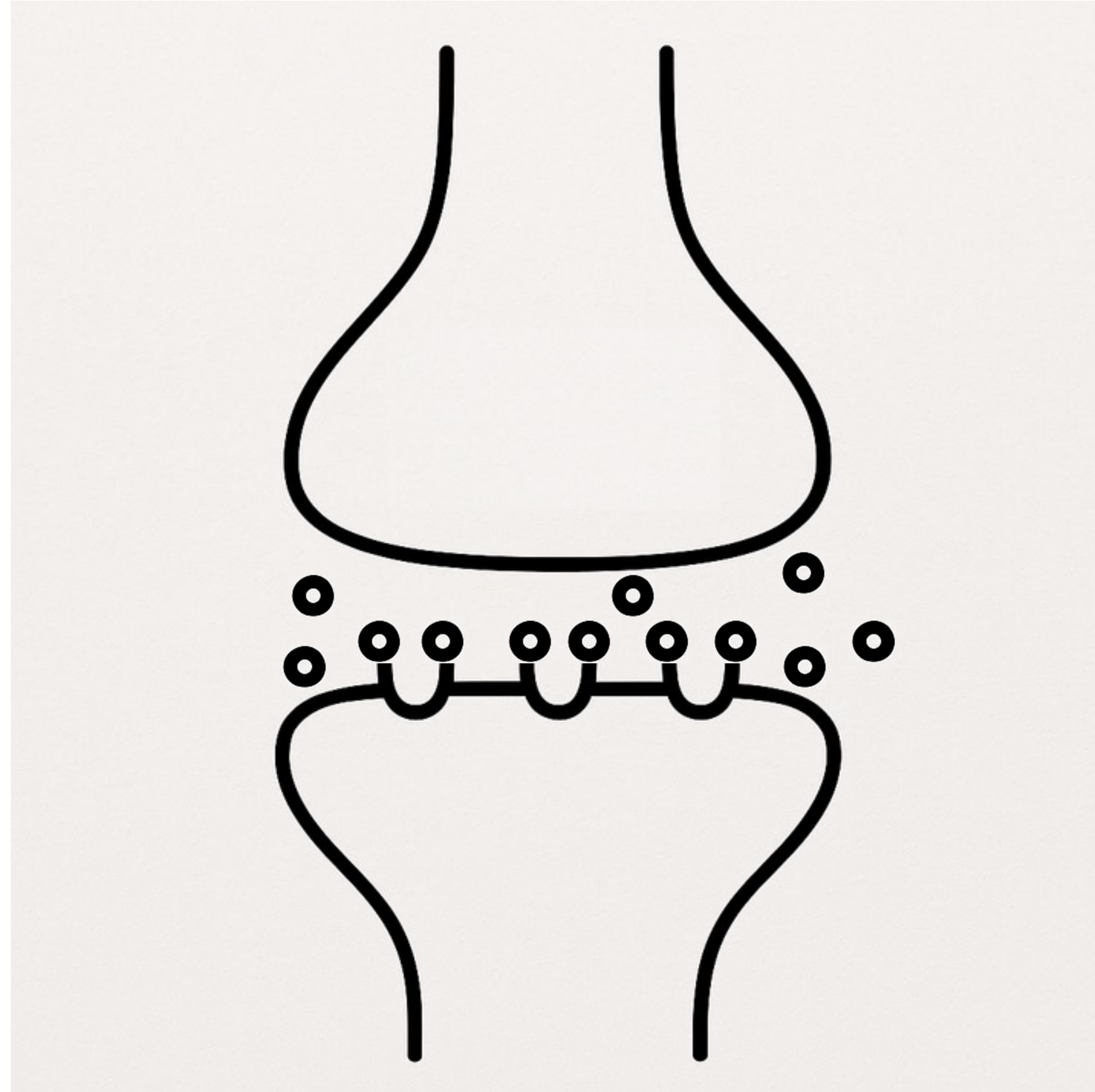
- Severe withdrawal symptoms
- Unable to function normally
- Action: Updose immediately, hold until symptoms resolve, then slow the taper.

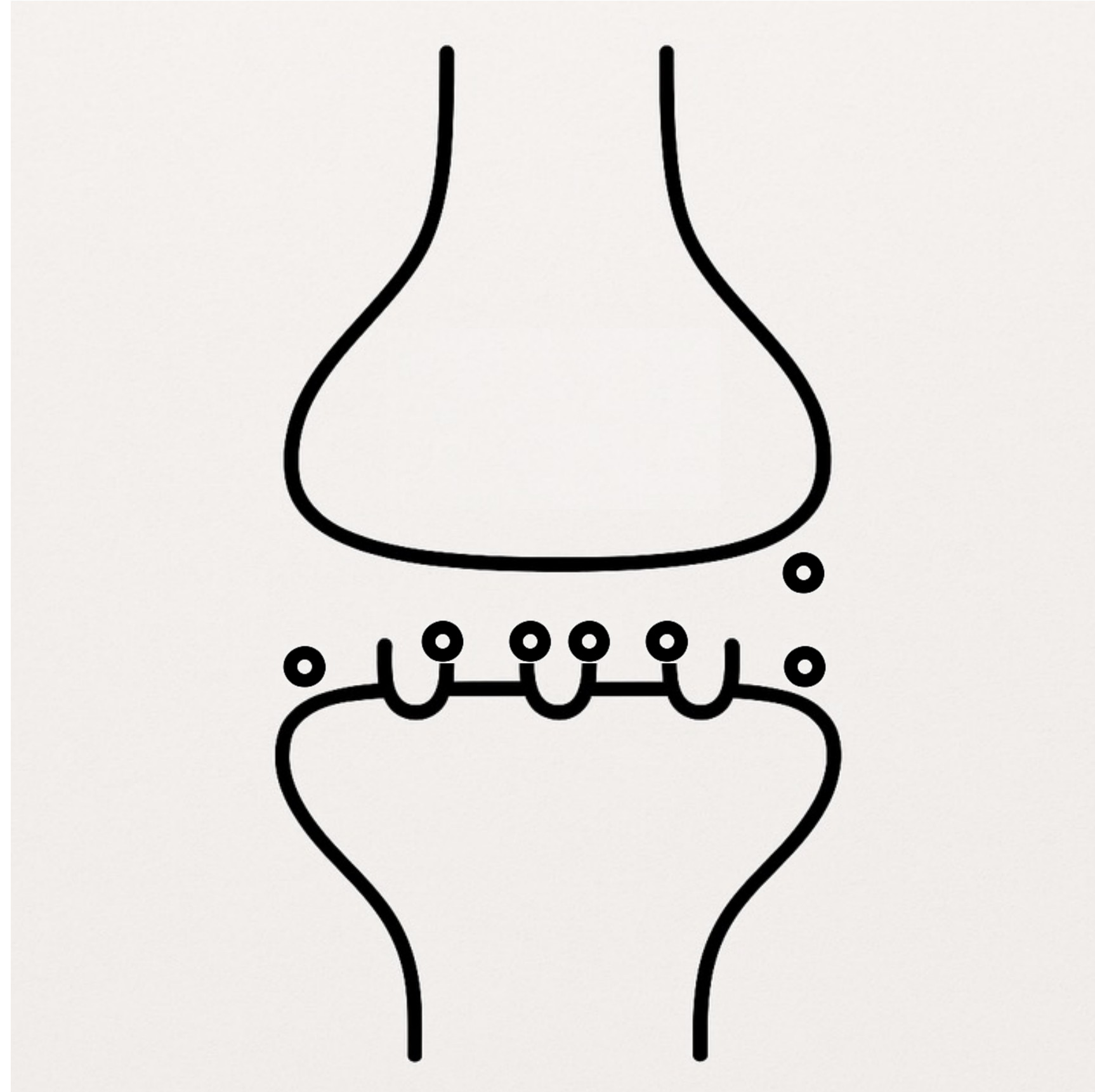
How to Finish the Taper Safely

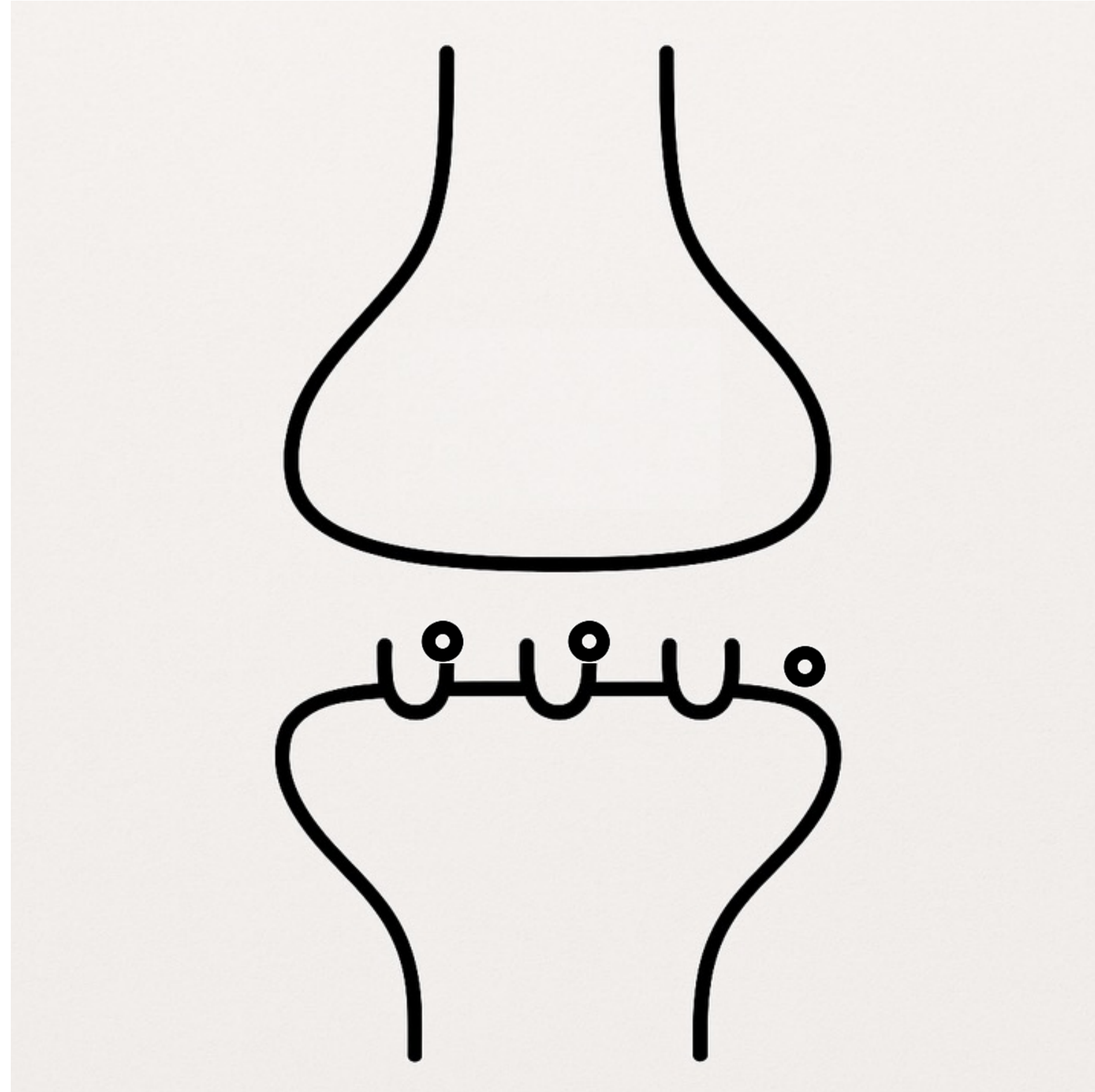
- The end of the taper is where 90% of people fail
- But why?
 - At high doses: receptors are mostly saturated.
 - Large reductions → small changes in receptor activity.
 - At low doses: small reductions → large drops in receptor occupancy.



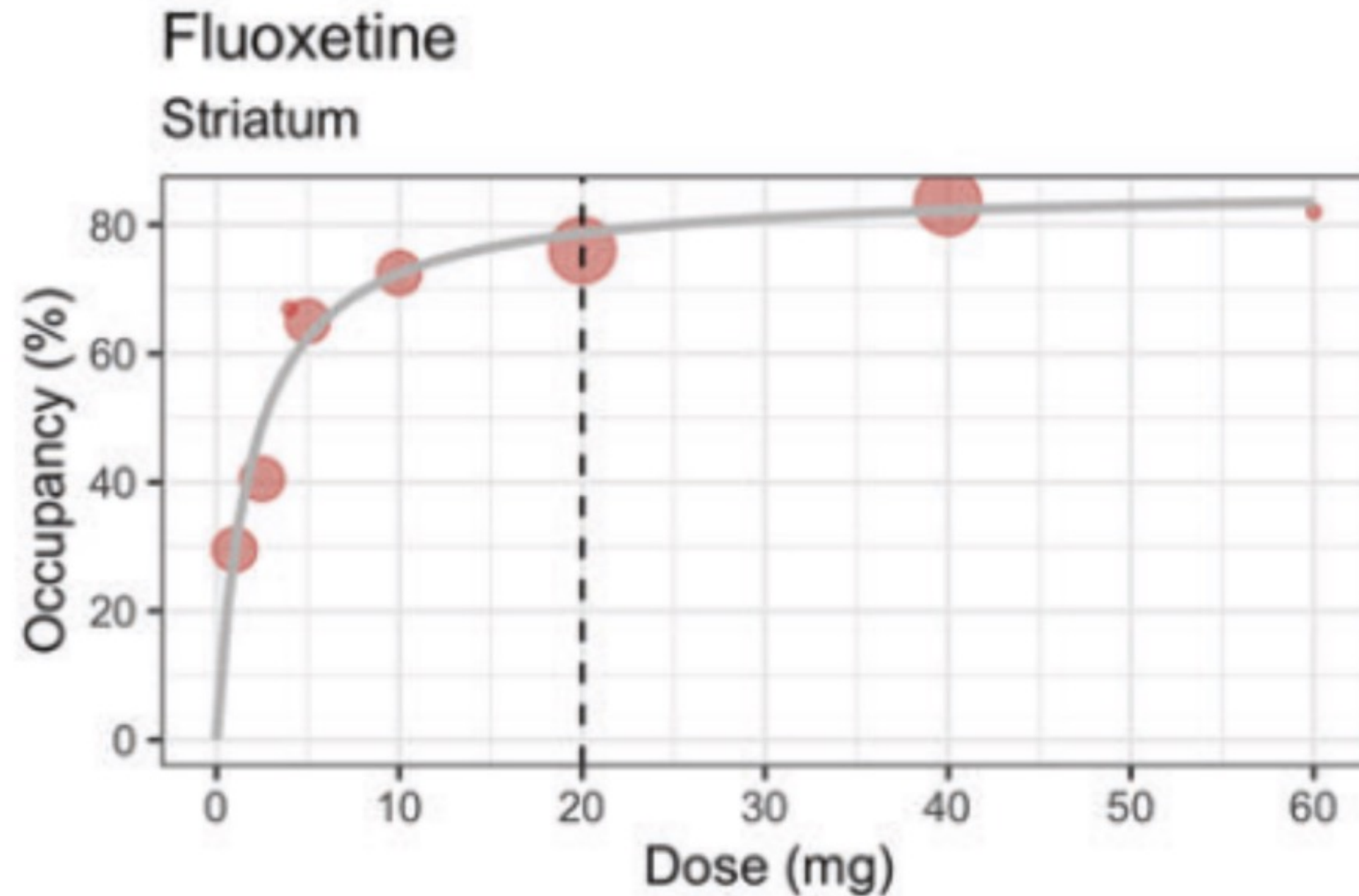








Examples



Sørensen, A., Ruhé, H. G., & Munkholm, K. (2022). Dose and serotonin transporter occupancy of antidepressants: A review. *Molecular Psychiatry*, 27, 192–201.

Rules for Finishing the Taper

- Expect the last 25% to take as long as the first 75%.
- Reductions often get smaller over time.
- Liquid formulations help with precise reductions.
- Avoid abrupt “jumping off.”



How to Stay Off Medications

The Three Pillars of Great Mental Health

Body

Mind

Spirit

Body

- Diet: Whole foods; minimize processed foods. Consider gluten-free if severe symptoms; ketogenic diet may help bipolar or schizophrenia with metabolic issues.
- Movement: 7,000–10,000 steps daily.
- Weight: Healthy BMI reduces inflammation, sleep problems, and anxiety.
- Remove Substances: Avoid caffeine, nicotine, cannabis, and alcohol.
- Screens: Reduce or take breaks from screen use.

Parletta, N., et al. (2019). A Mediterranean-style dietary intervention supplemented with fish oil improves diet quality and mental health in people with depression (HELFIMED trial). *Nutrients*.

Kelly, D. L., et al. (2019). Randomized controlled trial of a gluten-free diet in patients with schizophrenia positive for antigliadin antibodies (AGA IgG). *Journal of Psychiatry and Neuroscience*

Stubbs, B., et al. (2018). An examination of the anxiolytic effects of exercise for people with anxiety and stress-related disorders: A meta-analysis. *Psychiatry Research*.

Twenge, J. M., & Campbell, W. K. (2018). Associations between screen time and lower psychological well-being among children and adolescents: Evidence from a population-based study. *Preventive Medicine Reports*.

Mind - Skills Kits

- Depression/Anxiety: ACT
- PTSD: PE, CPT
- Schizophrenia: CBT for Psychosis
- Bipolar Disorder: Social Rhythm Therapy, ACT
- OCD: Exposure and Response Prevention
- Insomnia: ACT-I, CBT-I

Schefft, C., Heinitz, C., Guhn, A., Brakemeier, E. L., Sterzer, P., & Köhler, S. (2023). Efficacy and acceptability of third-wave psychotherapies in the treatment of depression: A network meta-analysis of controlled trials. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*

Mind - Mind-Body

- Breathwork 20 minutes x2
- Yoga Nidra
- Nature Walks

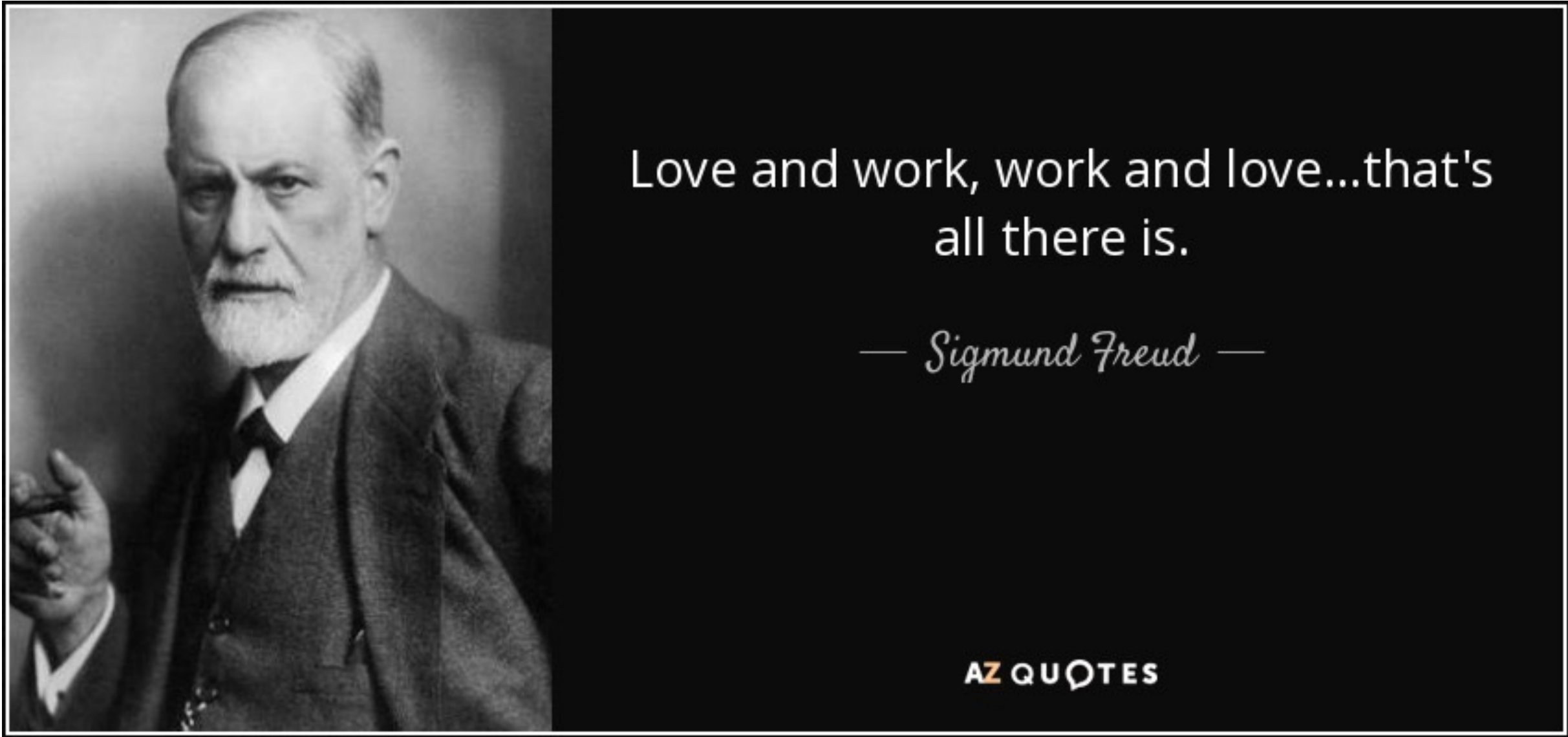
Breathwork meta-analysis

Fincham, G. W., et al. (2023). Effect of breathwork on stress and mental health: A meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. Scientific Reports.

Yoga Nidra meta-analysis

Ghai, S., et al. (2025). Effects of yoga nidra on stress, anxiety, and depression: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences.

Spirit



Love and work, work and love...that's all there is.

— Sigmund Freud —

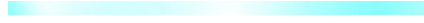
AZ QUOTES

Spirit

- Direction & Meaning: ACT, Existential Psychotherapy
- Relationships: DBT, Interpersonal Therapy

Alimujiang, A., Wiensch, A., Boss, J., et al. (2019). Association between life purpose and mortality among US adults older than 50 years. *JAMA Network Open*

Santini, Z. I., et al. (2015). The association between social relationships and depression: A systematic review. *Journal of Affective Disorders*.



Thank you

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