

Tricyclic antidepressants

To relieve pain



Your doctor has prescribed a tricyclic antidepressant for you. The purpose of this treatment is to relieve pain caused, among other things, by a damaged nerve (e.g. sensation of burning or shock, sharp pains).

In small amounts, tricyclic antidepressants such as amitriptyline (Elavil), desipramine (Norpramin) and nortriptyline (Aventyl) can relieve this type of pain. In cases of depression, the dose is higher.

How is this medication taken?

Tricyclic antidepressants are available in tablets that you can swallow. The first doses are often low. They can be increased gradually, according to the doctor's recommendations. Generally, the medication is taken once a day, at bedtime. You may need to take it more often. Follow your doctor's instructions.

The pain gradually decreases in the weeks following the start of treatment. The drug accumulates in the body and you feel better and better. It is important to take your medication regularly and to respect the prescribed doses.

Never stop taking your medication from one day to the next, as you could experience withdrawal symptoms (anxiety, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, etc.). Talk with your doctor about it first.

How long will this treatment go on?

Tricyclic antidepressants are used to relieve persistent pain. The treatment can go on for months or years. Tricyclic antidepressants are taken alone or in combination with other drugs.

What are the side effects?

Tricyclic antidepressants can cause:

- constipation
- dry mouth
- increased appetite and weight gain
- drowsiness (wanting to sleep)
- difficulty urinating

The fatigue of the first few days decreases as your body gets used to the medication. Most side effects disappear over time. If they persist or if you notice other effects, talk to a health care professional.



Tell your doctor if you have any of the following health problems:

- vision problems (glaucoma)
- palpitations (rapid heartbeat)
- difficulty urinating
- recent heart attack
- epilepsy

Tricyclic antidepressants can aggravate these problems.

Could I become addicted to tricyclic antidepressants?

No. There is no psychological dependence associated with this drug.

Can I drink alcohol during the treatment?

Alcohol can intensify the effects of medications. Avoid or limit your alcohol intake when taking tricyclic antidepressants.

Can I drive and do manual labour during the treatment?

Tricyclic antidepressants can cause drowsiness. You may have difficulty driving a car or using certain tools.

Before driving again or operating dangerous tools, make sure you're functional and fully awake.

Do I need to follow any special diet during the treatment?

To reduce the risk of constipation, unless there is any contraindication, eat high-fibre foods such as bran cereal, fruits and vegetables. Also, be sure to drink 6 to 8 glasses of liquids per day.



Can I take tricyclic antidepressants during pregnancy or when breastfeeding?

Your doctor may suggest that you stop treatment if you are pregnant or breastfeeding your baby. The effect of tricyclic antidepressants on pregnancy and breastfeeding is not well known.

If you're pregnant or breastfeeding, or planning to become pregnant, tell your doctor.

What happens if I take other medications or natural products?

Some medications or natural products can change the effect of tricyclic antidepressants. They can intensify or diminish the effect. It's always best to talk to your doctor or pharmacist before taking other products. He or she will make sure to avoid interactions, either by changing the time you take your medications or by offering you another product.



What should I do if I forget to take a dose?

Take it as soon as possible. However, if it's almost time for the next dose, wait until the usual time. **Ne doublez pas la dose.**

Don't double the dose.

Where should I store my medication?

Store it in a safe place, away from children. Medications are sensitive to heat and humidity. Don't store them in the kitchen or bathroom.

What should I do in case of an emergency or overdose?

If there is an overdose, these medications are very dangerous to health. **Don't hesitate: go to the emergency room.** For immediate assistance, call **9-1-1**



REMEMBER

You can manage your pain!

How? By doing:

- light activities
- progressive exercises
- relaxation techniques
- your favourite hobbies and pastimes



Eat well to maintain a healthy weight. Sleep enough to feel rested. Take your medications as prescribed.



For your health and that of your loved ones, never take someone else's medication and never share yours.

Who should I contact for help or to ask questions?

If you have questions about the medication, ask your pharmacist or nurse. Otherwise, ask your doctor at your next appointment.



USEFUL RESOURCES

Québec Association of Chronic Pain:
> douleurchronique.org

Canadian Pain Society:
> canadianpainsociety.ca

Société Française d'Étude et de Traitement de la Douleur:
> sfetd-douleur.org

International Association for the Study of Pain:
> iasp-pain.org

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our web site chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante



Questions

The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal chumontreal.qc.ca



