HEALTH SHEET

Lactulose

To prevent hepatic encephalopathy



You've been prescribed a medication called lactulose because you have liver disease. This sheet explains what it's used for, how to take it, and what precautions to follow.

Why is this medication prescribed for me?

It has been prescribed for you in order to avoid a brain-related problem that can be caused by liver failure or cirrhosis.

See the health sheets *Complication d'une insuffisance du foie – Reconnaître les signes* and *Living with cirrhosis*.

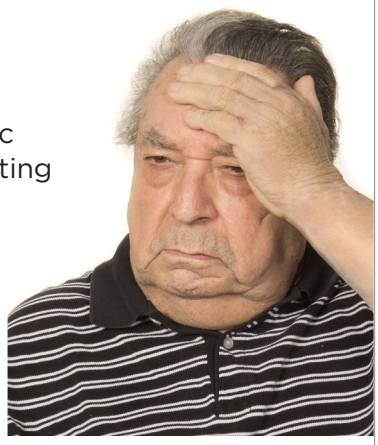
A toxin called ammonia is produced when food is digested.

A healthy liver converts this toxin into a substance that the body can eliminate through the urine. In the case of certain liver diseases, it's no longer able to do this.

Ammonia then accumulates in the blood. It gets to the brain and prevents it from functioning properly. This causes a condition called "hepatic encephalopathy".

This disorder causes the following symptoms:

- confusion
- slowed thinking and movements (psychomotor slowdown)
- memory loss
- difficulty concentrating
- sleep problems
- difficulty making specific movements, such as writing
- changes in behaviour or mood, such as anxiety and depression



How does this medication work?

Lactulose soften stools. It helps them pass more quickly. It's a laxative. It removes ammonia from your body through your stools before your body can absorb it.

How should I take the medication?

This medication comes in liquid form.

You need to take 1 to 2 tablespoons (15 to 30 ml) at a time, depending on what your doctor has prescribed.

If you can't stand the taste of lactulose, you can mix it with coffee or sweetened juice (for example, apple juice). If you do this, be sure to finish your drink so that you get the full dose.

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This dose should be taken 1 to 4 times a day. **The number of times you take it depends on how many bowel movements you've had during the day.** The medication is working well if you have 2 to 3 bowel movements per day.

If you've already had 3 bowel movements since waking up, skip the other doses you had planned to take during the day. Having more than 3 bowel movements a day could dehydrate you.

If you've had only one bowel movement during the day, take an extra dose the next day. If taking the medication 4 times a day doesn't seem to be working well enough, tell your doctor.

To help you remember when you took the medication, write it down in the table in the Appendix on page 3.

> Ideally, take your dose with a meal. Don't take this medication before bedtime unless it's necessary. It could make you get up during the night to use the bathroom.

How long does the treatment last?

Generally, lactulose needs to be taken long-term.

Are there any side effects?

You could experience these side effects:

- bowel discomfort
- swollen belly
- gas
- an urgent need to have a bowel movement

These side effects are normal. They're signs that the medication is working.

> Talk with your care team as soon as possible if you experience the following side effects after taking lactulose:
>
> - nausea
> - vomiting
> - loose stools (diarrhea)
>
> Your doctor could prescribe another medication instead.

Can I take other medications or natural health products?

Some medications or natural products can increase the effect of lactulose. Get advice from your doctor or pharmacist before starting a new medication.

Where should I store the medication?

Always leave the lactulose in its original bottle. Store it in a safe place, out of the reach of children.

What symptoms should I watch out for?

Call a nurse from the CHUM Patient Health Line at **514-890-8086** if you or a loved one finds that:

- you're confused
- you're slower than usual
- you fall asleep a lot

This support service is available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. When you call, make sure you have your health insurance (RAMQ) card on hand.



USEFUL RESOURCES

Other CHUM health fact sheets are available. Ask your care team which fact sheets can help you.

You can also read them online.
chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante

The content of this document in no way replaces the advice of your healthcare professional.

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APPENDIX: MONITORING LACTULOSE INTAKE AND BOWEL MOVEMENTS

Each time you take lactulose, note in the table below the date, time, and number of tablespoons taken (1 or 2). In the same column, further down, tick the box that best describes the amount of stool (a lot, average, small, trace) that you had afterwards and the box that best describes its consistency (normal or firm, pasty or soft, liquid or semi-liquid).

When filling in the table, follow the example in the first column.

Date	01/12											
Time	12 h											
Dose (in tablespoons)	1											
Amount of stool (check)												
A lot												
Average	X											
Small												
Trace												
Consistency of the stool (check)												
Normal or firm	X											
Pasty or soft												
Liquid or semi-liquid												

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Date												
Time												
Dose (in tablespoons)												
Amount of stool (check)												
A lot												
Average												
Small												
Trace												
Consistency of the stool (check)												
Normal or firm												
Pasty or soft												
Liquid or semi-liquid												

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