

Patient Information on Mirtazapine

(Remeron®, Remeron RD®, generic brands)

What is this medication used for?

This medication belongs to the class of medications called noradrenergic / specific serotonergic antidepressants (NaSSA). The most common conditions it is used for are:

- Depression (Major Depressive Disorder or Bipolar Depression)
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)
- Panic Disorder
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Social Phobia

Mirtazapine is available as a regular tablet, and a rapid disintegrating tablet (“RD”) that dissolves in saliva and can be swallowed with or without water. Mirtazapine is usually taken once a day at bedtime, as it may cause drowsiness.

How will this medication help me?

This medication can help symptoms such as:

- Depressive symptoms - low mood, changes in appetite and sleep, low energy, difficulty concentrating, decreased interest in normal activities, feelings of guilt
- Anxiety symptoms - excessive worry or trouble controlling worry, physical feelings of anxiety
- OCD symptoms – reduces obsessive thoughts and compulsions
- Panic - helps prevent panic attacks and PTSD symptoms

When will the medication start working?

Antidepressants may improve sleep, appetite and energy within 1-2 weeks after reaching an adequate dose; however, feelings of low mood, panic, or anxiety may take 4-12 weeks to fully improve. OCD symptoms also require a longer (8-12 week) trial to evaluate how well the medication works.

Because the medication takes time to work, do not change the dose or stop the medication without discussing this with your doctor. Your doctor may increase or decrease the medication slowly to decrease side effects. Stopping the medication suddenly may result in uncomfortable withdrawal effects like muscle aches, tingling feelings, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, sleep disturbances, headache, tremor or anxiety.

How long should I take this medication?

After a first episode of depression, it is recommended that the antidepressant be continued for at least one year; this prevents a relapse of the depression. For people who have had several episodes of depression, lifelong treatment with medication is recommended. Do not stop the medication without discussing it first with your doctor - some antidepressants need to be tapered slowly to avoid side effects. If you are taking antidepressants for other reasons, check with your doctor about how long to take it; most people require at least one year of treatment.

Side effects:

Many side effects are worse at the start of treatment and get better or disappear over a few weeks. If a side effect continues, speak to your doctor about how to manage it.

- Drowsiness - Usually improves over time. Medication should be taken at bedtime to prevent daytime drowsiness.
- Weight changes – Some people gain weight on this medication. You may get hungrier and you may put on weight more easily. If this is bothersome, choose healthier, non-processed foods and avoid sugary drinks and junk food. Tends to happen in the first month of treatment.
- Dry mouth – Ice cubes, sipping water, and sugarless gum help increase saliva in your mouth (avoid sweet juices or pop). For severe dry mouth, moisture sprays / gels for the mouth can be bought at a pharmacy – ask the pharmacist about what products are available.
- Constipation - Increase bulk foods in your diet (vegetables, brown breads, fruit) and drink plenty of water. If constipation is still a problem, consult your doctor or pharmacist.
- Suicidal thinking - A small percentage of young adults (24 or younger) may have an increase in suicidal thinking and behaviour after starting certain classes of antidepressants. In studies, this happens in about 4% of young adults compared to 2% taking a placebo (dummy pill). Young adults should be closely monitored when starting an antidepressant. Anyone with new or worsening suicidal thoughts should contact their doctor immediately.

This is not a complete list of side effects. If you feel unwell, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

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

If you take your total dose at bedtime and you forget to take it, skip the missed dose and continue with your schedule the next evening. Never double the dose.

Interactions with other medications

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about any other medications you are taking, including herbal remedies and over-the-counter medication like cold remedies. Always inform any doctor or dentist you see that you are taking this medication.

Other precautions

- Do not drive a car or operate heavy machinery if you feel drowsy or slowed down.
- This drug may increase the effects of alcohol, making you feel more sleepy, dizzy or lightheaded.
- Contact your doctor immediately if you become pregnant or intend to become pregnant.

This list is provided by Sunnybrook as a guideline to assist patients. Patients should always seek professional advice on the appropriate diet for their particular circumstances.

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