

Patient Information on SNRI Antidepressants

Desvenlafaxine (Pristiq®), Duloxetine (Cymbalta®) and generic brands, Levomilnacipran (Fetzima®), Venlafaxine XR (Effexor XR®) and generic brands

What is this medication used for?

This medication belongs to the class of medications called selective serotonin norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor (SNRI) antidepressants. The most common conditions they are used for are (depending on specific medication used):

- Depression (Major depressive disorder)
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Pain syndromes
- Panic Disorder
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Social Phobia or Social Anxiety Disorder

This medication is usually taken once a day. The tablet or capsule should be taken whole, not chewed or crushed. (Exception: if required for swallowing reasons, venlafaxine capsules may be opened and contents sprinkled onto soft food and swallowed whole).

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
- Panic - helps prevent panic attacks and PTSD symptoms
- OCD symptoms – reduces obsessive thoughts and compulsions
- Pain – may reduce neuropathic (nerve) pain and other pain syndromes

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. Pain symptoms may start to improve within 1 week.

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 for?

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.

- Stomach side effects - nausea (most common), heartburn, vomiting, diarrhea – Most common side effects. Usually goes away within 1-2 weeks. Taking medication with food can help. Do not crush or chew – this may increase stomach side effects.
- Headache – Usually is temporary. Can be managed with painkillers (e.g. acetaminophen / Tylenol®)
- Energized or agitated feeling – Some people may feel nervous or have difficulty sleeping for a few days after starting the medication. If the medication disturbs your sleep or if you get nightmares, take it in the morning.
- Decrease in appetite – Discuss this with your doctor.
- 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.
- Increased sweating – Frequent showering and use of antiperspirant can help. If sweating is severe, ask your pharmacist about stronger antiperspirants that are available.
- Drowsiness and feeling tired – Usually improves with time. Take dose at bedtime if this happens.
- 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.
- Increased blood pressure or heart rate – A small increase in blood pressure or heart rate can occur with this drug. Let your doctor know if you have been treated for high blood pressure.
- Decreases in sex drive or change in sexual performance – Discuss this with your doctor.

- Urination problems (with levomilnacipran only) – Difficulty in urination may rarely occur. Talk to your doctor if this happens.
- Suicidal thinking - A small percentage of young adults (24 or younger) may have an increase in suicidal thinking and behaviour after starting some types 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 forget a morning dose, you can take it later in the same day if you remember. If you take your total dose in the evening and you forget it, take it the next day in the evening as usual.

Interactions with other medications

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about any other medications you are taking, including herbal remedies and medications that you can buy at the pharmacy. 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. Duloxetine should be avoided in people with heavy alcohol use – speak to your doctor about this.
- 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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