

## Patient Information on Tricyclic Antidepressants

Amitriptyline (Elavil®), Clomipramine (Anafranil®), Desipramine, Doxepin (Sinequan®, Silenor®), Imipramine, Nortriptyline, Trimipramine

### What is this medication used for?

This medication belongs to the class of medications called tricyclic (TCA) antidepressants. The most common conditions they are used for are:

- Depression (Major depressive disorder)
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Insomnia (trouble sleeping)
- Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)
- Pain syndromes / Migraine headache prevention
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Social Phobia or Social Anxiety Disorder

This medication is most commonly taken once a day, usually at bedtime.

### 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
- Sleep – these medications may cause drowsiness and help you sleep; low dose doxepin is marketed specifically for sleep
- OCD symptoms – reduces obsessive thoughts and compulsions
- Pain syndromes – may reduce nerve (neuropathic pain) and prevent migraine headaches
- 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. Nerve pain and sleep 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.

- Drowsiness and feeling tired – Usually improves over time. Take dose at bedtime if this happens.
- Dizziness – Get up from a lying or sitting position slowly. Sit or lie down if dizziness persists.
- Energized, anxious or agitated feeling (rare) – Some people may feel nervous or have difficulty sleeping for a few days after starting the medication.
- Blurred vision – May occur at the start of treatment and gets better over 1-2 weeks. Reading under bright light or reading at a distance may help. Let your doctor know if it doesn't improve after 2 weeks.
- Nausea or heartburn – Usually goes away within 1-2 weeks. Taking medication with a meal can help.
- 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.
- 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.
- Headache – Usually is temporary. Can be managed with painkillers (e.g. acetaminophen / Tylenol®)
- Weight gain (most common with amitriptyline) – Some people may gain weight on this medication. If you gain weight, choose healthier, non-processed foods and avoid sugary drinks and junk food.
- Increased sweating – Frequent showering and use of antiperspirant can help. If sweating is severe, ask your pharmacist about stronger antiperspirants that are available.

- Difficulty with urination – Discuss this with your doctor if it occurs.
- Muscle tremor or twitching – Discuss this with your doctor if it occurs.
- Decrease in sex drive or sexual function – Discuss this with your doctor if it occurs.

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.
- Avoid eating grapefruit or drinking grapefruit juice if you are taking clomipramine. Grapefruit juice can increase the levels of clomipramine in your body.
- Contact your doctor immediately if you become pregnant or intend to become pregnant.

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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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