

Amitriptyline

Information and advice for patients

Pain Management

What is Amitriptyline?

Amitriptyline is an anti-depressant medication which can also be used to reduce some types of pain when it is taken in low doses. It works by reducing the excessive pain signals caused by damaged nerves. The doses that are used to treat pain are too low to have an effect on depression.

Amitriptyline is not licensed to treat nerve pain, but doctors can prescribe it 'off-label' if they think it will be effective for you.

What are the benefits of taking Amitriptyline?

The benefit of taking Amitriptyline is that it can ease long-term (chronic) nerve (neuropathic) pain such as burning, tingling, shooting, pins and needles and 'strange' sensations.

Amitriptyline can also improve your sleep.

Unlike some other painkillers, Amitriptyline will only work if you take it regularly and not just when you feel you need it. Amitriptyline may not begin to give pain relief until 2 – 3 weeks after you have started taking it, and it may take around 6 weeks for you to feel the full benefit, so you need to be patient. However, you should notice an improvement in your quality of sleep much sooner, often after the first dose.

What are the risks of taking Amitriptyline?

There is a risk you may not experience enough benefit from taking Amitriptyline. It is important that you continue taking it for the first 6 weeks before assessing how much pain relief it gives you. Common side effects of amitriptyline are:

- Mood changes
- Sleep problems
- Dizziness

Amitriptyline can also affect the levels of sugar in your blood, so if you have diabetes, make sure you check your blood sugar levels regularly. Other side effects include:

- Changes to your heart rhythm or blood pressure (this happens occasionally)
- Appetite changes and weight changes
- Dry mouth – If you experience this try chewing sugar-free gum or sucking pieces of ice or sugar-free sweets
- Blurred vision
- Difficulty passing urine
- Constipation

A full list of possible side effects can be found in the manufacturer's leaflet that comes with the medication.

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If you experience any of these side effects and are concerned please see your GP.

What are the risks of not taking Amitriptyline?

The risk of not taking Amitriptyline is that you won't experience the benefits it can give.

What are the alternative treatments?

There are a variety of other medications that can be used for nerve pain if Amitriptyline is not successful or you do not wish to use it. For information about suitable alternative medications please speak to your doctor.

Before taking Amitriptyline

Before taking this medication please let your doctor or nurse know if you have any heart or liver problems, epilepsy, diabetes, glaucoma, or if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, as this medication may not be suitable for you.

You should also inform them of any other medications, including herbal remedies, you are taking.

Please make sure you read the manufacturer's information leaflet that comes with Amitriptyline before taking it.

How to take Amitriptyline

Amitriptyline comes as a tablet which should be taken at night, shortly before you go to bed. Your doctor will prescribe the dose of Amitriptyline you need to take. The dose may be gradually increased and you will be advised on how and when to do this. Do not take a higher dose than you have been prescribed.

If you forget to take a dose do not worry, skip the missed dose and then continue with your next dose as usual.

You will be given an initial 4 week prescription and we will write to your GP so that they can continue prescribing Amitriptyline if it suits you, so make sure you get an appointment with them before your medication runs out.

Precautions

- Please make sure any health professionals seeing you are aware that you are taking Amitriptyline.
- Check the expiry date of your medication before using it.

Storing the medication

Store the tablets in cool, dry place out of reach and sight of children. Do not store them in the fridge.

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Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns about this treatment please contact:

Pain Management

0121 507 4344 or 5602

Monday – Friday, 9am – 4pm

If you have any problems outside of these times, or are experiencing severe side effects, please contact your GP.

Further information

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites www.swbh.nhs.uk and www.swbhengage.com, follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs.

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- British National Formulary, section 4.7.3 'Central nervous system, Neuropathic pain', April 2013
- British National Formulary, section 4.3.1 'Central nervous system, Tricyclic and related antidepressant drugs', April 2013
- Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, 'Amitriptyline for neuropathic pain and fibromyalgia in adults', December 2012
- National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, CG96 'Neuropathic pain', March 2010

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5420 or email: swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net



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