

Why have I been prescribed Amitriptyline ?

Amitriptyline belongs to a group of drugs called tricyclic antidepressants. These days, however, we don't often use amitriptyline to treat depression, but use it in low doses (10-25mg at night) for chronic pain in patients with conditions such as arthritis, spinal problems, fibromyalgia syndrome (FMS), chronic headaches and damage to nerve endings in the upper and lower limbs (peripheral neuropathy, for example in persons with Diabetes).

How does amitriptyline work?

Chronic pain is associated with changes in the central nervous system (the spinal cord and brain) that lead to failure of adequate pain regulation. This is called 'pain wind-up' or pain amplification and it adds to the distress caused by pain. Amitriptyline works by rebalancing the chemicals in the central nervous system.

Amitriptyline works by increasing the amount of specific nerve transmitters in the nervous system, reducing pain messages arriving in the brain.

Amitriptyline helps relax muscles, improve sleep, and also help reduce any anxiety or depression resulting from the pain.

How is amitriptyline taken?

The tablets should be swallowed whole, with a glass of water.

Amitriptyline may be taken on an empty or full stomach. It is best to take amitriptyline in the evening. Start by taking it one hour before going to bed, if you find that you feel drowsy the next morning, try taking it earlier in the evening.

Do not take more than prescribed.

How long will it take to work?

Every patient is different. Amitriptyline does not work immediately - you may notice some initial benefit within 2 weeks, however it may take up to 2 months for a full effect.

Usually, you will start on a low dose (e.g. 10 mg – usually a small blue tablet) and gradually increase it to 25 mg (usually a small yellow tablet) daily.

What are the side effects of amitriptyline?

Most side effects are mild and they tend to get better after a few doses. Common side effects include; drowsiness, dizziness, dry mouth, constipation and sweating.

Men with prostate enlargement sometimes find passing urine more difficult when they use amitriptyline – please discuss this with your doctor if

this happens to you.

Less common (usually at higher doses) side effects include fainting, trembling, irregular heartbeat, blurred vision.

What if I forget or miss a dose?

If you only take one dose at bedtime and you miss the dose, do not take the medicine in the morning. Wait until the next night and skip the missed dose. Do not take two doses together.

Can I drink alcohol while on amitriptyline?

You should minimise alcohol intake as amitriptyline increases the effects of alcohol and may make you drowsy. This is especially important if you are driving or using machinery.

Can I drive?

Amitriptyline may cause drowsiness. If this happens, do not drive.

Does amitriptyline affect fertility, pregnancy or breastfeeding?

There is no effect on fertility for men or women. Amitriptyline is not generally recommended during pregnancy. If you become pregnant or you are planning

a family while on amitriptyline you should discuss this with your doctor as soon as possible. If amitriptyline is taken during pregnancy, very rarely the newborn baby's heart rate is affected, or the baby may become restless. Make sure that your obstetrician/ midwife knows that you are taking amitriptyline. You should not breastfeed if you are on amitriptyline.

What is the dose of amitriptyline?

To treat severe pain, nerve pain and FMS low doses of amitriptyline are used (10-25mg at night). Studies have shown that higher doses don't work better (they don't help you get better sleep or relief from pain) and side effects are more common (especially drowsiness, and dry mouth). For this reason we suggest you don't use more than one 25mg tablet at night.

What if I don't like the tablet or feel it is not helping me?

Amitriptyline does not work for everyone. If you do not feel any improvement in your pain, speak to your doctor – either at the rheumatology clinic or at your Day Hospital. There are many other options that we can explore with you.

Talk to your rheumatologist and rheumatology nurse at your next appointment, or by phoning during clinic times ((021) 404 5394 (Friday) or 5313 (Thursday))
