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AMITRIPTYLINE FOR HEADACHE OR PAIN

What is Amitriptyline?

Amitriptyline has been used in medical practice for over 30 years. It was initially introduced as an antidepressant in a dose range between 150mg - 200mg but is also very effective as a pain reliever at lower doses.

What are its side effects?

The main side effects of Amitriptyline are drowsiness and dry mouth. These usually resolve with time. You should be cautious if you are driving or operating machinery. Amitriptyline may be best avoided if you have heart disease, liver disease, epilepsy or glaucoma.

How should I take it?

Amitriptyline should be taken at night-time starting with a dose of 10mg. This should then be increased by an extra 10mg every week or two up to the dose recommended. It need not be increased above any dose that is effective in controlling your symptoms (usually less than 100mg). Amitriptyline is also available in 25mg and 50mg tablets.

Pregnancy and breast-feeding

Amitriptyline is not recommended during pregnancy and should only be used if the benefits of its use outweigh the potential risks. The levels of amitriptyline in breast milk are low (1.5% of the maternal dose).

What do I do if I get side effects?

Side effects usually reduce with time. If you do get side effects you should reduce back to the dose level where there were no side effects for 2 weeks before attempting to raise the dose again. If you get side effects with the 10mg dose, you can start with half or a quarter of a tablet before building up slowly. (You can buy a useful tablet cutter from your pharmacist.

Common amitriptyline side-effects

Dry mouth
Constipation
Feeling of a fast heartbeat
Feeling dizzy or faint
Feeling sleepy/blurred vision
Feeling or being sick

What can I do if I experience this?

Try chewing sugar-free gum or sweets
Try to eat a well-balanced diet containing plenty of fibre and drink plenty of water
Speak with your doctor if this continues
Getting up more slowly may help and sit down until the feeling passes
If this happens, do not drive or use tools or machines. Do not drink alcohol
Stick to simple foods. Try eating smaller meals but more regularly

Also: Feeling anxious or confused, difficulties sleeping, tingling feelings, breast tenderness, difficulties with sexual function, changes in appetite and weight, changes in taste, ringing in the ears, itchy skin rash, loss of hair, increased sweating

If any of these become troublesome, speak with your doctor for advice

This leaflet is intended to provide a brief overview of aspects of this treatment protocol. It is not intended as a substitute for the comprehensive 'product information' leaflet found inside all boxes of medication.

The 'product information' leaflet should always be read before taking medication. Your prescribing doctor will discuss the risks and benefits of the medication as it relates to you and answer any further questions you may have.

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How long do I need to be on the tablets for?

Your tablets may not start working for at least 6-8 weeks and you should persevere for this length of time. A minimum length of time to be on the tablets is for at least 4-6 months when it may be worth attempting to reduce and stop them. If you have been on Amitriptyline for a long period of time then the tablets should be reduced gradually in conjunction with your doctor rather than stopping suddenly. Although this medication is widely used by headache specialists and there is a large amount of experience with it, it should be noted that it is not licensed for use in headache.

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