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PSYCHIATRY

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PATIENT EDUCATION

Amitriptyline

Generic tablets / Tricyclic antidepressant

A guide for adults taking amitriptyline.
Follow the directions on your prescription and your provider's recommendations.

TAKE ONLY AS PRESCRIBED

OVERDOSE CAN BE FATAL • STORE SECURELY

Formulations: Tablets come in several strengths. Some people take one bedtime dose; others are prescribed divided doses. Follow your own schedule.

What it is used for

Amitriptyline treats depression. Providers also use it off-label for conditions such as nerve pain and migraine prevention. The dose and goals may differ from those used for depression.

Off-label use means the FDA has not approved that specific use, although a provider may prescribe it when the evidence and your situation support it.

How it works

It slows the reuptake of serotonin and norepinephrine. It also affects histamine and acetylcholine receptors, which contributes to drowsiness, dry mouth, constipation, and other effects.

What to expect over time

Sleep, energy, or appetite may change before mood improves. Benefit usually builds over several weeks; some conditions need a longer trial at a useful dose.

Track the symptoms you are treating and how you manage daily activities. Keep follow-up appointments. Schedule an earlier appointment if your mood gets worse.

Taking your medication

- Take with or without food. If it causes sleepiness, discuss dose timing with your provider.
- If you miss a dose, take it when you remember unless it is almost time for the next dose. Then skip it. Do not double a dose.
- Do not combine doses or increase your dose to treat a difficult night.
- Avoid alcohol and use caution when driving. Consult with your provider before stopping.

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Side effects and safety

Possible side effects

- Dry mouth, constipation, or blurred vision
- Drowsiness or dizziness when standing
- Sweating, weight change, or sexual side effects

Keeping track of treatment

Some side effects resolve with time; others may require a change of medication. Discuss persistent or bothersome side effects with your provider.

Antidepressants can increase suicidal thoughts in people under 25. Watch for changes in mood or behavior at any age, especially when starting treatment or changing a dose.

Your provider may check pulse, blood pressure, weight, and an ECG, depending on your age, dose, other medications, and heart history. Report constipation or urinary problems before they become severe.

If you take too much

For a suspected overdose, call Poison Control at **1-800-222-1222** immediately, even if you feel well. Call 911 for a seizure, collapse, trouble breathing, or inability to wake.

Before you start

Discuss heart disease, a recent heart attack, fainting, glaucoma, difficulty urinating, severe constipation, seizures, bipolar symptoms, and kidney or liver problems.

Discuss pregnancy, pregnancy plans, and breastfeeding with your provider. Treatment decisions should consider both the medication and the condition being treated.

Medicines and interactions

Review all your medications with your provider, including over-the-counter medicines and supplements. Have new medications checked before taking them.

Do not combine with an MAOI antidepressant. Switching requires a specific waiting period; fluoxetine can continue to affect other medications for weeks.

Some antidepressants raise tricyclic levels. Medicines that affect heart rhythm, sedating antihistamines, bladder medicines, opioids, and alcohol can add important risks.

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Living with your treatment

When to get help

Emergency symptoms. Get emergency care for a seizure, severe allergic reaction, or sudden eye pain with vision changes. Fever with agitation, diarrhea, and stiff or twitching muscles may be serotonin syndrome and needs urgent assessment.

Prompt medical advice. Contact your provider right away for marked agitation, new hallucinations, or unusually high energy with very little need for sleep.

If you feel unsafe or have thoughts of self-harm, call 911 or go to an emergency department.

Your questions answered

Can I stop when I feel better?
Consult with your provider. Continuing treatment after improvement can reduce the chance that symptoms return. Most antidepressants should be reduced gradually to limit withdrawal symptoms.

What if I have sexual side effects?
Changes in desire, arousal, or orgasm are worth discussing. Your provider can review the dose or treatment options; do not stop or skip doses on your own.

Everyday tips

Stand up slowly and use caution on stairs if you feel lightheaded.

Sugar-free gum, regular dental care, and adequate fluids may help dry mouth. Discuss persistent constipation.

Store your supply securely. An overdose can be life-threatening even before symptoms appear.

Storage and safety

Keep medication in its labeled container, away from excess heat and moisture and out of reach of children and pets. Do not share it. Ask a pharmacy about disposal of unused medication.

Sources

MedlinePlus: Amitriptyline

Educational handout; does not replace your prescription or provider's recommendations.