

Amitriptyline (Elavil®)

Why is this medication prescribed?

- Amitriptyline:
 - treats pain by increasing the concentrations of chemical messengers in the nervous system to reduce the pain messages arriving in the brain.
 - treats pain from damaged nerves. The pain is usually described as burning, tingling, shooting, or numb.
 - can be used to treat fibromyalgia and prevent migraine headaches.
 - was once widely used as an antidepressant. The dose used to treat pain conditions is lower than that used to treat depression.

How should this medication be used?

- Amitriptyline comes as a tablet in the following strengths: 10mg, 25mg, 50mg, and 75mg.
 - *Note: the 75mg tablet is **NOT** covered by the Ontario government drug plan (ODB).*
- It is taken once a day, usually in the evening/a couple hours prior to bedtime. Take your dose at the same time each day.
- To minimize the development of side effects, amitriptyline is typically started as 10mg at bedtime and then increased in 10mg increments based on tolerability/effect. The final amitriptyline dose will be different for each patient.
- Amitriptyline is **NOT** a "pain killer" to be taken whenever pain becomes severe or for managing minor aches and pains. Amitriptyline should be **taken on a consistent basis**, according to your doctor's orders to help you control long-term pain.
- Do **NOT** abruptly stop taking amitriptyline without talking to your doctor. If for some reason amitriptyline is no longer needed, your doctor will reduce your dose gradually.

When does this medication start to work?

As the amitriptyline dose is slowly titrated to improve tolerability, it may take a little while before you notice the pain management benefits of this medication. It may take about 4 weeks of amitriptyline use to notice an improvement in pain control.

What special precautions should I follow?

- Before using amitriptyline tell your doctor if you have had any of the following health issues:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Glaucoma ○ Bipolar disorder ○ Seizure disorder ○ Heart disease ○ Overactive thyroid | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Trouble urinating ○ Are pregnant or breastfeeding or this situation is likely in the near future |
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- Do not take amitriptyline with a monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI) (e.g., antidepressants phenelzine, tranylcypromine, or moclobemide; Parkinson's disease medications selegiline or rasagiline) or within 14 days of discontinuing a MAOI medication.

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- Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of the medications you take (prescription, non-prescription, herbals, over-the-counter products, etc.) so drug interactions can be minimized.
- It is best to wait until your body adjusts to this new medication or a dose change before driving or operating machinery.
- If alcohol is used with amitriptyline it can result in more drowsiness. It is best not to drink alcohol when first starting amitriptyline and your body is adjusting to the new medication.

What should I do if I forget a dose?

- Take the missed dose as soon as you remember it unless it is almost time for the next dose. In this case, skip the missed dose and continue your regular dosing schedule.
- Do **NOT** take a double dose to make up for a missed dose.

What side effects can this medication cause?

All medicines can cause side effects, which may range from mild to severe.

Possible side effects of amitriptyline include:

- Drowsiness/sedation
 - If you experience a “hangover” effect in the morning after taking amitriptyline, try taking the medication earlier in the evening. For example, take amitriptyline 12 hours prior to the time you want to wake up.
- Dry mouth – use sugarfree gum/lozenges or Biotene® mouth rinses to help reduce this
- Blurred vision
- Constipation
- Difficulty urinating
- Dizziness
- Weight gain
- Confusion
- Heart rhythm disturbances (at higher doses)

Remember that your doctor has prescribed this medication because he or she has judged that the benefit to you is greater than the risk of side effects. Many people using this medication do not have serious side effects.

What storage conditions are needed for this medication?

- Keep this medication in the container it came in, tightly closed and out of reach of children.
- Store at room temperature, away from excess heat/moisture (not in the kitchen or bathroom).
- If at any point in the future amitriptyline is stopped by your doctor, return any remaining supply to your community pharmacist for proper medication disposal.

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