

# Duloxetine (Cymbalta®)

## Why is this medication prescribed?

- Duloxetine works by increasing the brain levels of two chemical messengers, norepinephrine and serotonin, that help to lessen the intensity of incoming pain signals.
- Duloxetine is used to treat pain from damaged nerves, fibromyalgia, chronic low back pain, and knee pain due to osteoarthritis. Duloxetine is also used to treat depression and anxiety.

## How should this medication be used?

- Duloxetine comes as either a 30 mg or 60 mg capsule.
- It is taken by mouth once a day, at the same time each day.
- The usual dose for pain management is 60 mg daily.
  - To minimize side effects, your doctor may prescribe 30 mg once daily to be taken for the first week with a dose increase to 60 mg once daily the next week.
- Duloxetine may be taken with or without food, although taking it with food may reduce the presence of nausea.
- Duloxetine is **NOT** a "pain killer" to be taken whenever pain becomes severe or for managing minor aches and pains. Duloxetine 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 duloxetine without talking to your doctor. Sudden stopping of this medication can cause severe headache, poor sleep, nausea, panic attack and agitation. If duloxetine is no longer needed, your doctor will reduce your dose gradually.

## When does this medication start to work?

It usually takes 1-4 weeks from starting duloxetine for pain management benefits to be noticed.

## What special precautions should I follow?

- Before using duloxetine talk to your doctor if you have had any of the following health issues:
  - Glaucoma
  - Bipolar disorder
  - Seizure disorder
  - Kidney or liver disease
  - Hypertension (high blood pressure)
  - Are pregnant or breastfeeding or this situation is likely in the near future
- Do not take duloxetine with a monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI) medication (e.g., the antidepressants phenelzine, tranylcypromine, or moclobemide; the Parkinson's disease medications selegiline or rasagiline) or within 14 days of discontinuing a MAOI medication.
- When duloxetine is first tried, it is best to wait until your body adjusts to this new medication or a dose change before driving or operating machinery.
- 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.
  - Duloxetine should **NOT** be taken with alcohol.

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- Bruising/bleeding risk may be increased if duloxetine is taken with “blood thinner” medications or NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) like ibuprofen.

## 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 can range from mild to severe. The most common side effects are:

- Dry mouth → use sugarfree gum/lozenges or Biotene® mouth rinses to help reduce this
- Nausea
- Constipation
- Insomnia or drowsiness
- Dizziness
- Increased sweating
- Decreased appetite

Duloxetine may increase blood pressure and can sometimes make it more difficult to urinate. Duloxetine may also cause or worsen sexual dysfunction.

Inform your doctor **immediately** if you notice:

- New difficulties with mood or worsening mood, behavioural or emotional changes or have thoughts of self-harm when taking duloxetine
  - When used to treat depression and other mental health conditions, antidepressant medications have infrequently been associated with increased risk of suicidal thinking, feeling, and behavior in children, adolescents and young adults.
- Symptoms of serotonin syndrome (a condition where there is too much serotonin that is typically due to a drug interaction)
  - Shivering, overactive reflexes (twitching/muscle jerks), increased body temperature, changes in blood pressure/heart rate/breathing, agitation/restlessness, sweating
- Skin rash involving blisters
- Symptoms of liver injury, such as: jaundice (yellowing of the skin), tea-coloured urine, pale stools, itch, right-sided abdominal pain
  - Duloxetine has on the rare occasion been involved in cases of liver damage

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.

## How should I store 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 duloxetine is stopped by your doctor, return any remaining supply to your community pharmacist for proper medication disposal.

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