

# Nabilone (Cesamet®)

## Why is this medication prescribed?

- Nabilone is a synthetic cannabinoid made by the pharmaceutical industry. It is similar to marijuana (the natural plant) in its actions, but usually has less effect on mood.
- Nabilone is typically used to treat severe nausea and vomiting associated with certain types of cancer chemotherapy and can be used to stimulate appetite.
- Nabilone is also used to treat chronic nerve related pain.

## How should this medication be used?

- Nabilone comes as 0.25 mg, 0.5 mg, and 1 mg capsules.
- The usual dose of nabilone is 1 to 2 mg twice a day.
- Typically, we start with a low dose (such as 0.5 mg at bedtime) and increase the dose slowly to minimize the risk of side effects.
- Nabilone can be taken with or without food.

*\*Note: the 0.25 mg capsules are not covered by certain drug plans, including the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) program.*

## When does this medication start to work?

- The onset of pain relief may be as soon as 1 week, although it may take a few weeks before some individuals notice pain relief.
- With each nabilone dose, the onset of effect is within 60–90 minutes, and the duration of action is 8–12 hours.

## What special precautions should I follow?

- Nabilone can impact the mental and/or physical abilities needed to do certain tasks, such as driving a vehicle and operating machinery.
- It is best to wait until your body adjusts to this new medication or a dose change before driving or operating machinery.
- Nabilone can increase the effect of certain drugs or substances. For example, nabilone should **NOT** be taken with alcohol because this can make you sleepier, dizzy and lightheaded. If you take other medications that cause drowsiness, the addition of nabilone can cause further drowsiness. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of the medications you take (prescription, non-prescription, herbals, over-the-counter products, etc.).

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## 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. Some side effects can be serious, while others might just be annoying.

Possible side effects of nabilone include:

- Drowsiness
- Dizziness
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering things
- Dry mouth - use sugarfree gum/lozenges or Biotene® mouth rinses to reduce this
- Changes in appetite
- Headache

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

- Changes in mood (depression, anxiety)
- Hallucinations
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat
- Difficulty breathing
- Severe drowsiness
- Slurred speech

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

## Use in pregnancy and breastfeeding

- The safety of nabilone during pregnancy or while breastfeeding has **NOT** been established.
- You should **NOT** use nabilone if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

## What storage conditions are needed for this medication?

- Nabilone is a controlled substance. It should be kept in a secure location, ideally in a locked cabinet/cupboard.
- 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 nabilone is stopped by your doctor, return any remaining supply to your community pharmacist for proper medication disposal.

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