

# Tapentadol Extended Release

## (Nucynta ER<sup>®</sup>)

### Why is this medication prescribed?

- This medication is used to relieve moderate to severe pain in adults.
- Tapentadol is an atypical opioid medication because it has a unique mechanism of action:
  - Tapentadol binds with certain opioid receptors to block pain signals from reaching the brain. This action is similar to that of opioid medications such as morphine.
  - Tapentadol also works by increasing the brain levels of a chemical messenger called norepinephrine. This feature is similar to that of some antidepressant medications used to treat pain. Norepinephrine is one of the chemical messengers involved in pain signaling.

### How should this medication be used?

- This medication is an extended release product that comes as 50 mg, 100 mg, 150 mg, 200 mg, and 250 mg tablets.
- Tapentadol tablets should be swallowed whole; **do NOT** crush, break, dissolve, or chew these tablets because this can lead to the uncontrolled release and rapid absorption of a potentially fatal dose of tapentadol.
- This medication can be taken with or without food.
- The extended release tablet should be taken twice a day, at the same time every day.
- Initially, a low dose of tapentadol is tried and then the dose is adjusted based on pain relief and tolerability.
- The maximum dose of extended release tapentadol is 250 mg twice a day.
- Do **NOT** take more tapentadol than is prescribed because it can cause serious side effects, such as seizures or causing you to stop breathing.
- Do **NOT** stop this medication abruptly. Generally, a gradual dose reduction is needed if the drug ever needs to be stopped.

*\*Tapentadol is not covered by some drug plans, such as the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) program*

### When does this medication start to work?

- You should notice some pain relief within 3-6 hours of taking extended release tapentadol. With continued twice daily dosing, a steady amount of drug will be present in the blood supply and help achieve continuous pain relief.

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## What special precautions should I follow?

- You should NOT take this medication if you have had an allergic reaction to tapentadol
- Be sure to tell your physician and pharmacist if you have any of the following conditions before starting tapentadol:
  - History of head injury or seizures
  - Current or prior issues with drug/alcohol addiction or abuse
  - Conditions affecting the intestines (e.g., bowel obstruction)
  - Liver or kidney disease
  - Breathing problem
  - Are pregnant or breastfeeding
- Do **NOT** take tapentadol 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 stopping a MAOI.
- Tapentadol can impact the mental/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.
- If you already take medications that cause drowsiness, the addition of tapentadol can cause further drowsiness.
- Be sure to tell your doctor and pharmacist all of the medications you take (prescription, non-prescription, herbals, over-the-counter products, etc.) so drug interactions can be minimized.
- Tapentadol should NOT be taken with alcohol.

## 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 tapentadol include:

- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Constipation
- Headache
- Drowsiness

Tapentadol has a small potential to be habit forming, although this is less than the risk with opioid medications.

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

- Seizures
- Symptoms of serotonin syndrome, a condition where there is too much serotonin that is typically due to a drug interaction. Symptoms include shivering, overactive reflexes (twitching/muscle jerks), increased body temperature, changes in blood pressure/heart rate/breathing, agitation/restlessness, sweating.

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

### How should I store this medication?

- In a secure location (ideally a locked cupboard) due to tapentadol's opioid-related properties.
- 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 tapentadol is stopped by your doctor, return any remaining supply to your community pharmacist for proper medication disposal.

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