

# Citalopram (Celexa®)

## What is it and why is it prescribed?

- Citalopram belongs to the family of medicines called **selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs)** and works by increasing the amount of serotonin in the brain. Serotonin is a chemical messenger involved in controlling many important bodily functions: sleep; aggression; eating; sexual behaviour; and mood.
- Citalopram is used to treat a wide range of mental health conditions, including but not limited to: unipolar depression (low mood); panic disorder; obsessive compulsive disorder; and anxiety disorders.
- The overall goal of citalopram is to help individuals improve their ability to function and manage their mental health on a daily basis.
  - When treating depression, the goal is to improve the control of low mood, sleep, appetite, energy level as well as interest in daily living activities.
  - When treating panic disorder, the goal is to reduce anxiety, fear, unwanted thoughts, and panic attacks (both in terms of frequency and severity).

## How should this medication be used?

Citalopram is available as 10 mg, 20 mg, and 40 mg tablets. Typically, the dose is started as 10 mg once a day with or without food (either in the morning or evening). The dose can be increased gradually based on response and tolerability in 10 mg increments up to a maximum of 40 mg/day.

## When does citalopram start to work and how long should it be taken?

- Citalopram does not start working immediately; it has a delayed onset of response and may take 4 – 8 weeks, or sometimes longer, to achieve the desired response.
- The minimum duration of citalopram treatment for the first episode of depression is one year. For individuals with risk of depression recurrence such as chronic pain patients, the minimum duration of treatment is two years. For patients with multiple recurrent episodes of depression, treatment may be ongoing for more than two years.
- For long-term citalopram use for any indication, the dose should be maintained at the lowest effective dose and patients should be periodically assessed to determine the need for continued treatment.

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## What special precautions should I follow?

- Before using citalopram, talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you have thoughts of suicide or harming yourself. When citalopram is used to treat depression, some of the symptoms of depression can improve faster than others. If you are having thoughts of suicide and starting citalopram improves your energy level, but those thoughts haven't yet improved/disappeared, you may be at risk of carrying out those thoughts. It is important to talk with your health care providers about these situations so we can put a plan in place and support you to ensure your safety.
- Citalopram can impact the electrical activity of the heart by extending the interval between when the heart contracts and relaxes. This situation is known as QT prolongation and can occur if citalopram is taken at too high a dose or in combination with other medications that can also cause QT prolongation. This is why the usual recommended adult maximum dose of citalopram is 40 mg/day. In the elderly, the maximum dose is often limited to 20 mg/day. Sometimes, as part of citalopram safety monitoring, an electrocardiogram (also known as an ECG) will be done to check the heart rhythm.
- 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. This is especially important with citalopram because we want to avoid the use of too many medications that all work on serotonin.
- Do not take citalopram with a monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI) or within 14 days of stopping a MAOI. This includes: antidepressants phenelzine, tranylcypromine, or moclobemide; Parkinson's disease medications selegiline or rasagiline.
- Never stop citalopram abruptly because doing so will make you feel like you have flu-like symptoms. If you don't want to continue with citalopram, it is best to slowly wean off the medication in a manner similar to how it was gradually started. Please talk to your prescriber for guidance.

## What should I do if I forget a dose?

Take the missed dose as soon as you remember 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?

### Common side effects that often improve after a couple weeks of use:

- Nausea, diarrhea, dry mouth, increased sweating

### Side effects that usually don't decrease over time and should be discussed with the prescriber:

- Sexual side effects (such as problems with low sex drive, orgasm, ejaculation, or erectile dysfunction) can happen with a variety of antidepressant medications, including citalopram.

### Less common, but serious side effects:

- Low sodium levels in the blood (hyponatremia) which may present with the following symptoms: headache; weakness; and difficulty concentrating and remembering. This condition is more likely to happen in older patients and those taking other medications that can lower the sodium levels (such as diuretics or "water pills").

### Inform your doctor immediately if you notice:

- Symptoms of serotonin syndrome, a condition where there is too much serotonin - 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; and 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.

## 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).