

# Oxcarbazepine (Trileptal®)

## Why is this medication prescribed?

- Oxcarbazepine is most commonly used in the management of epilepsy.
- Oxcarbazepine can be used to treat nerve pain by blocking sodium channels. It is most commonly used to treat trigeminal neuralgia, a chronic pain condition affecting the trigeminal nerve (a nerve carrying sensation from your face to your brain) but may also be used to manage nerve pain resulting from a spinal cord injury.
- Oxcarbazepine is also used for the treatment of acute mania or the prevention of bipolar disorder episodes.

## How should this medication be used?

- Oxcarbazepine can be taken with or without food and comes in the following forms:
  - 150 mg, 300 mg and 600 mg tablet
  - 60 mg/mL oral suspension
- Oxcarbazepine is usually started at 300 mg twice a day and is gradually increased in 300 to 600 mg/day increments each week to achieve the desired effect. The usual target dosing range is 600 to 900 mg twice a day. The maximum dose is 2,400 mg/day.
- When used for pain management, oxcarbazepine is **NOT** a "pain killer" to be taken whenever pain becomes severe or for managing minor aches and pains. It 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 oxcarbazepine without talking to your doctor. If for some reason oxcarbazepine is no longer needed, your doctor will reduce your dose gradually.

## When does this medication start to work?

As the oxcarbazepine dose is slowly titrated to improve tolerability, it may take several weeks before you notice the benefits of this medication.

## What special precautions should I follow?

- Before using oxcarbazepine tell your doctor if you have any of the following health issues:
  - Hypersensitivity reactions to medications such as carbamazepine
  - A history of bone-marrow suppression (low blood counts) or serious blood disorder
  - Are pregnant or breastfeeding or if this situation is likely in the near future
- 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.
  - Oxcarbazepine may reduce the effectiveness of certain oral contraceptives, which may necessitate the use of a second contraceptive option, such as condoms.
- 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 oxcarbazepine it can result in more drowsiness. It is best not to drink alcohol when first starting oxcarbazepine and your body is adjusting to the new medication.

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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?

The side effects of oxcarbazepine are similar to that of carbamazepine, although there are fewer and less severe side effects with oxcarbazepine than carbamazepine.

- The most common dose-related side effects include:
  - Fatigue
  - Headache
  - Dizziness
  - Ataxia, which is a lack of muscle control or coordination of voluntary movements such as walking or picking up objects. Ataxia can affect various movements and create difficulties with speech, eye movement and swallowing.
- Other side effects can include nausea and vomiting.
- Skin rash can happen in up to 10% of all patients taking oxcarbazepine. Serious skin rashes are rare. The risk of developing a serious rash is increased in patients of Asian ancestry, particularly those of Han Chinese ancestry who possess a specific gene (HLA-B\*1502). Oxcarbazepine can be tried in patients who experienced a carbamazepine hypersensitivity (allergic) reaction. (Cross-reactivity with carbamazepine only occurs in about 25-30% of cases). Contact your health care provider if you develop a rash while taking oxcarbazepine.
- There is a 2-3% risk of low sodium levels in the blood (hyponatremia), particularly within the first three months of starting oxcarbazepine. The drug's impact on the sodium level is usually mild and does not cause problems. Generally, the impact on sodium levels is dose-dependent. For example, lower doses have less impact on sodium levels than higher doses. Monitoring the blood sodium level may be required if other medications are being used that can also lower sodium levels, such as diuretics or "water pills".

## 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 oxcarbazepine is stopped by your doctor, return any remaining supply to your community pharmacist for proper medication disposal.