



# Chronic Pain Centre Patient Medication Information

**For each medication listed in this document, the following questions are answered:**

1. Why have I been prescribed this medicine?
2. What dose do I take?
3. What side effects might occur?
4. How to I manage these side effects?
5. How long do I take the medicine for?

## **List of Medications**

- Amitriptyline
- Baclofen (Lioresal, Lioresal DS)
- Carbamazepine (Tegretol, Tegretol CR)
- Gabapentin (Neurontin)
- Lamotrigine (Lamictal)
- Nortriptyline (Aventyl)
- Opioid Analgesics
- Oxcarbazepine (Trileptal)
- Phenytoin (Dilantin)
- Pregabalin (Lyrica)
- Topiramate (Topamax)
- Triptan Medications
- Valproic Acid (Depakene, Epival)

# Amitriptyline

## **Why have I been prescribed a medicine that is used for the treatment of depression, when I do not suffer from depression?**

Amitriptyline is an antidepressant drug that has pain relieving action and is **not addictive**. It is widely used to reduce pain caused by irritated or damaged nerves (such as burning or hypersensitive to touch). The pain-relieving dose is lower than that for depression. Because it is a sedating drug, it is also used as a 'sleeping pill'.

## **What dose of Amitriptyline do I take?**

The starting dose is 10mg **at bedtime**. Preferably take it 1 or 2 hours before your normal bedtime, as it may take a while to work. It can be increased by 10mg **every fourth to seventh night**, to a maximum of 150mg. You can increase the dose until adequate pain relief is achieved, or until side effects become too troublesome.

## **What side effects might occur? (some may wear off over time)**

### **Common**

- dry mouth
- constipation
- drowsiness (if affected the following day, do not drive or operate machinery)
- effects of alcohol will increase
- increased appetite/weight gain

### **Occasional**

- blurred vision or other visual disturbance
- urine retention

## **Side effect management?**

If side effects do occur, reduce dose 10mg and remain on that dose for a few extra nights. If the side effects do settle, you may remain on that dose or start to increase it again but more slowly this time. Report these to your nurse or doctor at your next visit. If you do get dry mouth, try sucking on a hard candy, chew gum, drink extra fluids. It is important to maintain good oral hygiene, eg brush and floss regularly.

## **How long do I take the medicine for?**

Nerve pain can be a long term problem and may take a while to treat – take the tablets every night, unless your doctor tells you to stop. **Do not suddenly stop taking it** – a gradual reduction is usually necessary.

## Baclofen (Lioresal, Lioresal DS, generics)

### **Why have I been prescribed a medicine that is a muscle relaxant, when I do not have tight muscles?**

Baclofen is a drug which belongs to the muscle relaxant class but in lower doses, can be used to control pain caused by irritated or damaged nerves. **It is not addictive.**

### **What side effects might occur? (some may wear off over time)**

#### **Common**

- drowsiness ( if effected, do not drive or operate machinery)
- dizziness
- nausea
- weakness

#### **Occasional**

- headache
- confusion
- nausea
- constipation

### **How long do I take the medication for?**

Nerve pain or spasm can be a long term problem which may take several weeks for resolution. **Baclofen** however usually starts to work in a few days but the full effect may take longer to develop – take it every day unless your doctor tells you to stop. **Do not suddenly stop taking it** – a gradual reduction is necessary to prevent seizures.

### **What dose of baclofen do I take?**

The starting dose is 5mg once a day. It can be increased every 3 to 5 days by 5mg. The pills are available as different strengths and you may have to take more than one pill to make up a dose. The table on the other side shows you how to increase your dose. If you achieve adequate pain control at a lower dose, you do not have to go to the next dose level. You may stop at any dose level. Also, if you are experiencing excessive side effects you may go back to the previous dose level for a few extra days. You may then try to again increase the dose once the side effects have decreased.

## **Carbamazepine (Tegretol, Tegretol CR, generics)**

### **Why have I been prescribed a medicine that is used to control epilepsy, when I do not suffer from epilepsy?**

Carbamazepine is an anti-epileptic (anticonvulsant) drug that, in low doses, can be used to control pain caused by irritated or damaged nerves (which may be shock-like, stabbing, burning). **It is not addictive.**

### **What side effects might occur? (some may wear off over time)**

#### **Common**

- drowsiness ( if effected, do not drive or operate machinery)
- dizziness
- nausea
- headache

#### **Occasional**

- visual disturbance
- weight increase
- mood changes
- vomiting

If symptoms such as fever, sore throat, rash, mouth sores or easier bruising occur, contact your doctor immediately.

### **How long do I take the medication for?**

Nerve pain can be a long term problem and may take several weeks for **carbamazepine** to become fully effective– take it every day unless your doctor tells you to stop. **Do not suddenly stop taking it** – a gradual reduction is usually necessary.

### **What dose of carbamazepine do I take?**

The starting dose is 100mg twice a day. It can be increased every fourth day by 100mg to a maximum dose of 1200mg per day. The pills are available as different strengths and you may have to take more than one pill to make up a dose. The table on the other side shows you how to increase your dose.

If you achieve adequate pain control at a lower dose, you do not have to go to the next dose level. You may stop at any dose level. Also, if you are experiencing excessive side effects you may go back to the previous dose level for a few extra days. You may then try to again increase the dose once the side effects have decreased.

## **Gabapentin** (Neurontin, also generics) :

### **Why have I been prescribed a medicine that is used to control epilepsy, when I do not suffer from epilepsy?**

Gabapentin is an anti-epileptic (anticonvulsant) drug that, in low doses, can be used to control pain caused by irritated or damaged nerves (which may be shock-like, stabbing, burning). **It is not addictive.**

### **What side effects might occur? (some may wear off over time)**

#### **Common**

- drowsiness ( if effected, do not drive or operate machinery)
- dizziness
- stomach discomfort – **do not** take antacids at the same time. Take them 2 hours before or after taking your gabapentin

#### **Occasional**

- visual disturbance
- muscle weakness
- weight increase
- swelling of hands or feet

If the side effects become intolerable, you may return to the lower dose for a longer period of time. Try the increased dose again, when you feel able.

### **How long do I take the medication for?**

Nerve pain can be a long term problem and may take several weeks for **gabapentin** to become fully effective– take it every day unless your doctor tells you to stop. **Do not suddenly stop taking it** – a gradual reduction is usually necessary.

### **What dose of gabapentin do I take?**

The starting dose is 100mg twice a day. It can be increased every day by 100mg to a maximum dose of 900mg four times a day. The pills are available as different strengths and you may have to take more than one pill to make up a dose. The table on the other side shows you how to increase your dose.

You do not have to increase to 900mg four times a day, if you achieve adequate pain control at a lower dose. You may stop at any dose level. Also, if you are experiencing excessive side effects you may go back to the previous dose level for a few extra days. You may then try to again increase the dose once the side effects have decreased.

## **Lamotrigine** (Lamictal, generics)

### **Why have I been prescribed a medicine that is used to control epilepsy, when I do not suffer from epilepsy?**

Lamotrigine is an anti-epileptic (anticonvulsant) drug that, in low doses, can be used to control pain caused by irritated or damaged nerves (which may be shock-like, stabbing, burning). **It is not addictive.**

### **What side effects might occur? (some may wear off over time)**

#### **Common**

- dizziness
- lack of energy
- nausea
- rash

#### **Occasional**

- visual disturbance
- confusion
- numbness or tingling
- slurred speech or other co-ordination difficulties

If symptoms such as rash, fever, sore throat, mouth sores, double vision or easier bruising should occur, contact your doctor immediately.

### **How long do I take the medication for?**

Nerve pain can be a long term problem and may take several weeks for **lamotrigine** to become fully effective– take it every day unless your doctor tells you to stop. **Do not suddenly stop taking it** – a gradual reduction is usually necessary.

### **What dose of lamotrigine do I take?**

The starting dose is 25mg daily. It can be increased by 25-50mg every 1 to 2 weeks to a maximum dose of 400mg per day. The pills are available as different strengths and you may have to take more than one pill to make up a dose. The table on the other side shows you how to increase your dose.

If you achieve adequate pain control at a lower dose, you do not have to go to the next dose level. You may stop at any dose level. Also, if you are experiencing excessive side effects you may go back to the previous dose level for a few extra days. You may then try to again increase the dose once the side effects have decreased.

## **Nortriptyline** (Aventyl, also generics)

### **Why have I been prescribed a medicine that is used for the treatment of depression, when I do not suffer from depression?**

Nortriptyline is an antidepressant drug that has pain relieving action and is **not addictive**. It is widely used to reduce pain caused by irritated or damaged nerves (such as burning or hypersensitive to touch). The pain-relieving dose is lower than that for depression.

### **What dose of Nortriptyline do I take?**

The starting dose is 10mg **at bedtime**. Preferably It can be increased by 10mg **every fourth night**, to a maximum of 150mg. You can increase the dose until adequate pain relief is achieved, or until side effects become too troublesome.

### **What side effects might occur? (some may wear off over time)**

#### **Common**

- dry mouth
- constipation
- drowsiness (if affected the following day, do not drive or operate machinery)
- effects of alcohol will increase
- increased appetite/weight gain

#### **Occasional**

- blurred vision or other visual disturbance
- urine retention

### **Side effect management?**

If side effects do occur, reduce dose 10mg and remain on that dose for a few extra nights. If the side effects do settle, you may remain on that dose or start to increase it again but more slowly this time. Report these to your nurse or doctor at your next visit. If you do get dry mouth, try sucking on a hard candy, chew gum, drink extra fluids. It is important to maintain good oral hygiene, eg brush and floss regularly.

### **How long do I take the medicine for?**

Nerve pain can be a long term problem and may take a while to treat – take the tablets every night, unless your doctor tells you to stop. **Do not suddenly stop taking it** – a gradual reduction is usually necessary.

# Opioid Analgesics

## Why are opioid analgesics (opioids) prescribed?

Opioids are strong pain killers used to relieve moderate to severe pain. They may be used either alone or in combination with other pain killers. They work by decreasing the body's ability to sense pain. There are several opioid-class medications on the market and many different versions (liquids, tablets, suppositories).

Some commonly used opioids include:

- Codeine (codeine, Codeine Contin)
- Fentanyl (Duragesic)
- Hydromorphone (Dilaudid, Hydromorph Contin)
- Meperidine (Demerol)
- Methadone (Metadol)
- Morphine (Statex, MS-Contin, M-Eslon)
- Oxycodone (Supeudol, OxyContin)

## How do I take opioids?

Some of these medications are available in combination with other pain killers (eg Tylenol #3), they may be short or long acting. This may limit the number of doses you are able to take in one day, or may provide the option of taking fewer doses.

In addition, your doctor may prescribe a long acting version (typically taken 2 or 3 times a day) as well as a short acting version (which is usually taken more frequently). If long acting tablets or capsules are prescribed, do not split, crush or chew them. You may open the capsule and sprinkle it the pellets/beads on a small amount of food to aid in swallowing – do not crush or chew the pellets or beads.

## What side effects might occur? (some may wear off over time)

### Common

- Dizziness
- Drowsiness
- Nausea
- Constipation

### Less Common

- Sweating
- Difficulty urinating
- Rash / itchiness
- Confusion
- Visual problems

## What dose do I take?

Your dose(s) will be determined by your doctor and may be adjusted over time in conjunction with your pain needs. Take it as directed.

## Oxcarbazepine ( Trileptal)

### Why have I been prescribed a medicine that is used to control epilepsy, when I do not suffer from epilepsy?

Oxcarbazepine is an anti-epileptic (anticonvulsant) drug that can be used to control pain caused by irritated or damaged nerves (which may be shock-like, stabbing, burning) or for migraine headache prevention. **It is not addictive.**

### What side effects might occur? (some may wear off over time)

#### Common

- dizziness
- drowsiness
- nausea
- vision problems
- lack of energy

#### Occasional

- headache
- tremor
- difficulties with movement

If symptoms such as rash, double vision, breathing difficulties, should occur, contact your doctor immediately.

### How long do I take the medication for?

Nerve pain can be a long term problem and may take several weeks for oxcarbazepine to become fully effective— take it every day unless your doctor tells you to stop. **Do not suddenly stop taking it** – a gradual reduction is usually necessary.

### What dose of oxcarbazepine do I take?

The starting dose is 300mg 2 times per day. It may be increased by 300 to 600mg weekly to a usual maximum dose of 1200mg per day. Doses of up to 2400mg per day have however been used. The pills are available as different strengths and you may have to take more than one pill to make up a dose. The table on the other side shows you how to increase your dose.

If you achieve adequate pain control at a lower dose, you do not have to go to the next dose level. You may stop at any dose level. Also, if you are experiencing excessive side effects you may go back to the previous dose level for a few extra days. You may then try to again increase the dose once the side effects have decreased.

## Phenytoin (Dilantin)

### Why have I been prescribed a medicine that is used to control epilepsy, when I do not suffer from epilepsy?

Phenytoin is an anti-epileptic (anticonvulsant) drug that can be used to control pain caused by irritated or damaged nerves (which may be shock-like, stabbing, burning). **It is not addictive.**

### What side effects might occur? (some may wear off over time)

#### Common

- drowsiness ( if effected, do not drive or operate machinery)
- mental confusion
- nausea
- irritation of the gums

#### Occasional

- nervousness
- headache
- mood changes
- increased hair growth

If symptoms such as fever, sore throat, rash, mouth sores, easier bruising or difficulty co-ordinating movements occur, contact your doctor immediately.

### How long do I take the medication for?

Nerve pain can be a long term problem and may take several weeks for **phenytoin** to become fully effective– take it every day unless your doctor tells you to stop. **Do not suddenly stop taking it** – a gradual reduction is usually necessary.

### What dose of phenytoin do I take?

The starting dose is 100mg 3 times per day. It may be increased to a maximum dose of 600mg per day. The pills are available as different strengths and you may have to take more than one pill to make up a dose. The table on the other side shows you how to increase your dose.

If you achieve adequate pain control at a lower dose, you do not have to go to the next dose level. You may stop at any dose level. Also, if you are experiencing excessive side effects you may go back to the previous dose level for a few extra days. You may then try to again increase the dose once the side effects have decreased.

## **Pregabalin** (Lyrica)

### **Why have I been prescribed a medicine that is used to control epilepsy, when I do not suffer from epilepsy?**

Pregabalin is an anti-epileptic (anticonvulsant) drug that, in low doses, can be used to control pain caused by irritated or damaged nerves (which may be shock-like, stabbing, burning). **It is not addictive.**

### **What side effects might occur? (some may wear off over time)**

#### **Common**

- drowsiness ( if effected, do not drive or operate machinery)
- dizziness
- lack of energy
- headache

#### **Occasional**

- visual disturbance
- confusion
- tremor or difficulty in coordinating movements
- weight increase
- swelling of hands or feet

If the side effects become intolerable, you may return to the lower dose for a longer period of time. Try the increased dose again, when you feel able.

### **How long do I take the medication for?**

Nerve pain can be a long term problem and may take several weeks for **pregabalin** to become fully effective– take it every day unless your doctor tells you to stop. **Do not suddenly stop taking it** – a gradual reduction is usually necessary.

### **What dose of pregabalin do I take?**

The starting dose is 75mg twice a day. It can be increased every day by 75mg weekly to a maximum dose of 300mg 2 times per day. The pills are available as different strengths and you may have to take more than one pill to make up a dose. The table on the other side shows you how to increase your dose.

You do not have to increase to the maximum dose chosen by your doctor, if you achieve adequate pain control at a lower dose. You may stop at any dose level. Also, if you are experiencing excessive side effects you may go back to the previous dose level for a few extra days. You may then try to again increase the dose once the side effects have decreased.

## **Topiramate (Topamax, generics)**

### **Why have I been prescribed a medicine that is used to control epilepsy, when I do not suffer from epilepsy?**

Topiramate is an anti-epileptic (anticonvulsant) drug that can be used to control pain caused by irritated or damaged nerves (which may be shock-like, stabbing, burning) or for migraine headache prevention. **It is not addictive.**

### **What side effects might occur? (some may wear off over time)**

#### **Common**

- difficulty concentrating or slow thinking
- mental confusion
- difficulty with thinking of specific words
- tingling or numbness of extremities
- weight loss

#### **Occasional**

- nervousness
- constipation, diarrhea, gas, heartburn, taste change, loss of appetite
- mood changes
- vision changes
- seizure worsening

If symptoms such as seizures, fever, sore throat, rash, easier bruising, breathing difficulties, irregular heart rate, severe loss of appetite occur, contact your doctor immediately.

### **How long do I take the medication for?**

Nerve pain can be a long term problem and may take several weeks for topiramate to become fully effective— take it every day unless your doctor tells you to stop. **Do not suddenly stop taking it** – a gradual reduction is usually necessary.

### **What dose of topiramate do I take?**

The starting dose is 25mg 2 times per day. It may be increased by 25 to 50mg weekly to a maximum dose of 400mg per day. The pills are available as different strengths and you may have to take more than one pill to make up a dose. The table on the other side shows you how to increase your dose.

If you achieve adequate pain control at a lower dose, you do not have to go to the next dose level. You may stop at any dose level. Also, if you are experiencing excessive side effects you may go back to the previous dose level for a few extra days. You may then try to again increase the dose once the side effects have decreased.

## **‘Triptan’ Medications**

The ‘Triptans’ are a class of medications that are prescribed for the relief of migraine headaches. They are NOT used for prevention of headache or to reduce the severity of headaches; other medications are used for those purposes.

There are many different ‘triptans’ marketed world-wide. Those available in Canada include:

- Almotriptan (Axert)
- Eletriptan (Relpax)
- Naratriptan (Amerge)
- Rizatriptan (Maxalt)
- Sumatriptan (Imitrex)
- Zolmitriptan (Zomig)

### **How do I take ‘triptans’?**

The usual approach to taking these medications is to take a dose at the first sign of a migraine headache. If the headache is still severe after 2 – 3 hours it is not generally recommended to take a second dose at this time first dose typically has not had a chance to work and this could lead to a greater risk of side effects. It is however accepted to use 2 doses over a 24 hour period. Your doctor may also limit your weekly dose – overuse of triptans may also lead to further headaches.

### **Is one ‘triptan’ “better” than another?**

The best ‘triptan’ is the one that you tolerate and works well for you – no different than any other drug. However there are some differences among the family of triptans with some of these being dependent on what dose you are taking – higher doses may increase the risk of some side effects.

Some examples:

Tiredness, lack of energy, confusion – may be more common with eletriptan, rizatriptan or zolmitriptan.

Flushing, tingling or feelings of warmth – may be more common with sumatriptan or zolmitriptan

Some may act slower but might last longer such as naratriptan.

### **What side effects may occur?**

#### **Common**

- Dizziness
- Drowsiness
- Flushing or feeling of warmth
- Tingling of face, neck or jaws

#### **Less common**

- Upset stomach
- Diarrhea

If symptoms such as a fast or irregular heartbeat, wheezing or difficulty breathing, itchiness or swelling of the face/lips/eyelids, or severe tightness or chest pressure should occur, contact your doctor immediately.

## **Valproic Acid (Depakene, Epival, generics)**

### **Why have I been prescribed a medicine that is used to control epilepsy, when I do not suffer from epilepsy?**

Valproic acid is an anti-epileptic (anticonvulsant) drug that, in low doses, can be used to control pain caused by irritated or damaged nerves (which may be shock-like, stabbing, burning). It is also used for the prevention of migraine headache. **It is not addictive.**

### **What side effects might occur? (some may wear off over time)**

#### **Common**

- drowsiness ( if effected, do not drive or operate machinery)
- dizziness
- nausea

#### **Occasional**

- weight increase
- mood changes
- vomiting
- hair thinning

If symptoms such as fever, sore throat, rash, mouth sores, easier bruising or severe nausea occur, contact your doctor immediately.

### **How long do I take the medication for?**

Nerve pain can be a long term problem and may take several weeks for valproic acid to become fully effective– take it every day unless your doctor tells you to stop. **Do not suddenly stop taking it** – a gradual reduction is usually necessary.

### **What dose of valproic acid do I take?**

The starting dose is 250mg twice a day. It can be increased every fourth day by 250mg according to the maximum dose selected by your doctor. The pills are available as different strengths and you may have to take more than one pill to make up a dose. The table on the other side shows you how to increase your dose.

If you achieve adequate pain control at a lower dose, you do not have to go to the next dose level. You may stop at any dose level. Also, if you are experiencing excessive side effects you may go back to the previous dose level for a few extra days. You may then try to again increase the dose once the side effects have decreased.