

# Lamotrigine (la-mot-ri-jeen)

## Patient Information - Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy

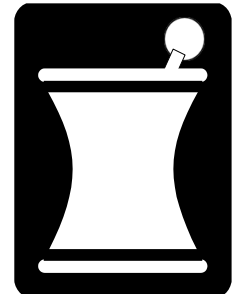
### Why have I been prescribed lamotrigine?

Lamotrigine is used to prevent mood swings, which happen in bipolar affective disorder. People with bipolar affective disorder have mood swings that are much more severe than the small changes in mood which everyone experiences. With bipolar affective disorder, mood may be elevated or depressed (up or down).

When the mood is extremely elevated this is called hypomania or mania. People with hypomania feel very energetic and elated but can be irritable and frustrated. They may talk very quickly, sleep very little and be full of ideas and plans. They can be described as being “high”. Treatment is usually needed because when people are “high” they may make poor judgements and can quickly become exhausted.

Periods of depression will also occur in bipolar affective disorder. Symptoms include feelings of sadness, tiredness and poor sleep. Occasionally, antidepressants are used to help overcome these feelings. Lamotrigine helps stabilise the mood and helps even out the highs and the lows.

Lamotrigine is usually tried only when other mood stabilisers, such as lithium or valproate, have not worked. Lamotrigine can be used on its own or with other mood stabilisers and works best at reducing depressive episodes.



### What exactly is lamotrigine?

Lamotrigine is known as a mood stabiliser. It can be used to treat other disorders. Lamotrigine is also an anticonvulsant and is used to help prevent epileptic fits or seizures.

There are a number of brands (of lamotrigine. Some examples are ‘Lamictal®’, Logem®, ‘Mogine®’ and ‘Arrow-Lamotrigine®’.

### Is lamotrigine safe to take?

It is usually safe to take lamotrigine regularly as prescribed by your doctor, but it doesn’t suit everyone. Let your doctor know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care may be needed:

- If you suffer from kidney or liver trouble, or your family has a history of liver trouble.
- If you are taking any other medication (e.g. sodium valproate). This includes medicine that you have bought over the counter from your pharmacist.
- If you are pregnant, breast feeding or wish to become pregnant.
- If you have ever developed a rash after taking lamotrigine or any other medication for epilepsy or if you are allergic to any medications for epilepsy.

## **How should I take lamotrigine?**

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Look at the label on your medicine; it should have all the necessary instructions on it. Follow these directions carefully. If you have any questions, speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

## **How is lamotrigine started?**

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Your doctor will start you on low dose of lamotrigine and gradually increase your dose, once every one to two weeks. This is to prevent you from developing a serious rash. Rashes can occur if you take too high a starting dose or increase your dose too quickly. It will take at least five to six weeks to get up to the target dose.

## **What should I do if I miss a dose?**

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Never change your dose without consulting with your doctor. If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember, as long as it is within a few hours of the usual time.

If you stop lamotrigine for more than three to five days for any reason, you must not restart it at your usual dose. You will need to start at a low dose again as you may be more likely to develop a serious rash if you restart at your usual dose.

## **What will happen when I start taking lamotrigine?**

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For most people with bipolar affective disorder, highs and lows occur infrequently, so it may take months to see the effects of lamotrigine.

Lamotrigine should make these highs and lows less extreme or less frequent. The best way to know whether lamotrigine is working for you is to compare your highs and lows before and whilst taking it.

Some people may get some side effects before they start to feel better. Most of these are quite mild and should go away after a few weeks.

Look at the table over the page. It tells you what to do if you get any side effects. Not everyone will get the side effects shown. There are many other possible side effects. Ask your pharmacist, doctor or nurse if you are worried about anything else that you think might be a side effect.

## **When I feel better, can I stop taking lamotrigine?**

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No. If you stop taking lamotrigine, your original symptoms may return. You should decide with your doctor when you can come off it. Lamotrigine is not addictive.

## **What about alcohol?**

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It is recommended that people taking lamotrigine should not drink alcohol. This is because both lamotrigine and alcohol can cause drowsiness. If the two are taken at the same time, severe drowsiness can occur. This can lead to falls or accidents. As well as this, drinking alcohol often makes your mood unstable. Excessive drinking is especially likely to do this.

Once people are used to taking medication, they can sometimes drink alcohol in small amounts without any harm.

Avoid alcohol altogether for the first one or two months. After this, if you want a drink, try a glass of your normal drink and see how you feel. If this doesn't make you feel drowsy, then it is probably okay to drink small amounts.

It pays to be very cautious because alcohol affects people in different ways, especially when they are taking medication.

Don't stop taking your medication because you fancy a drink at the weekend. If you do drink alcohol, drink only small amounts. Never drink alcohol and drive while you are taking lamotrigine.

Discuss any concerns you may have with your doctor, pharmacist or nurse.

SIDE EFFECT	WHAT IS IT?	WHAT SHOULD I DO IF THIS HAPPENS TO ME?
<b>COMMON</b>		
Rash	A rash seen anywhere on the skin.	This is more common if the dose is increased too quickly. Contact your doctor immediately.
Ataxia	Being very unsteady on your feet.	Your dose may be too high. Contact your doctor.
Dizziness	You feel light headed and faint.	Don't stand up too quickly. Try and lie down when you feel it coming on. Don't drive.
Drowsiness	Feeling sleepy or sluggish. It can last for a few hours after taking your dose.	Don't drive or use machinery. Ask your doctor if you can take your lamotrigine at a different time of the day.
Headache	When your head is painful and pounding.	It should be safe to take paracetamol.
Nausea	You feel sick or have an upset stomach.	This should wear off after a while. Taking each dose with or after food may help. Contact your doctor if it doesn't.
<b>UNCOMMON</b>		
Blurred vision	Things look fuzzy and you can't focus properly.	See your doctor if you are worried. You won't need glasses.
Diplopia	Seeing double.	Don't drive or use machinery. See your doctor if you are worried. You won't need glasses.
Confusion	Your mind is all mixed up.	Your dose may be too high. Contact your doctor.
Insomnia	You find it difficult to sleep at night.	Contact your doctor.

Irritability, aggression,	You feel more on edge.	Try and relax by taking deep breaths. Contact your doctor if it is bad.
<b>RARE</b>		
Photo sensitivity	Skin goes blotchy in the sun.	Avoid direct sunlight or sunlamps. Use a high factor sun block cream.
Bone marrow depression	Low numbers of white cells in the blood. You may get more infections.	Contact your doctor immediately if you have a sore throat, fever, or feel unwell in any way.
Steven-Johnson syndrome	A red or purple rash that spreads within hours to days with face and tongue swelling. Blistering or peeling of the skin. Influenza (flu) like symptoms such as fever, sore mouth and throat, tiredness, and cough.	Stop taking your lamotrigine and contact your doctor immediately, particularly if this occurs within the first eight weeks of treatment.
<b>If you are also taking valproate or carbamazepine, you are more likely to suffer from a rash and some of the uncommon side effects</b>		

**Remember, leaflets like this can only describe some of the effects of medication. You may also find other books or leaflets useful. If you have access to the internet, you may find a lot of information there as well. Be careful as internet-based information is not always accurate.**

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