

MAOI Antidepressants

Patient Information - Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy

Why have I been prescribed a MAOI?

MAOIs (Mono Amine Oxidase Inhibitors) are a group of medicines called antidepressants which are used to treat depression.

Depression is a common condition. It is different from the normal “ups and downs” of everyday life. People with depression may feel sad most of the time and maybe lacking in motivation. Changes in appetite, tiredness and poor sleep are very common. Many people also find that they simply cannot enjoy any of the pleasures of life.



Depression can be treated in many different ways. Antidepressants are often used because they are effective for most people. “Talking” therapies are also effective for some people in depression.

People with depression and anxiety may sometimes have suicidal thoughts. When starting these medicines, it is recognised that initially these thoughts may increase in intensity and so additional support or supervision may be needed. Please talk with your mental health provider immediately if these thoughts occur.

What exactly are MAOIs?

MAOIs are antidepressants. They are not tranquillisers or sleeping tablets. They have been in use for over sixty years. They are useful in resistant depression when other medicines have failed. They are also good for ‘atypical’ depression. The MAOI group of drugs include tranylcypromine (‘Parnate’).

Are the MAOIs safe to take?

It is usually safe to take MAOIs regularly as prescribed by your doctor, but they don’t suit everyone.

Let your doctor know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care may be needed:

- If you have diabetes, epilepsy, hyperthyroidism, porphyria, phaeochromocytoma, or suffer from heart or liver trouble;
- If you are pregnant, breastfeeding, or wish to become pregnant.
- If you are taking any other medicines. This includes any medicines you are taking which are available to buy without a prescription, as well as herbal and complementary medicines.

How should I take my MAOI and what should I do if I miss a dose?

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

Never change your dose without checking 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.

Are MAOIs addictive?

MAOIs are not addictive. Some people do get some “discontinuation” effects if they stop their MAOI suddenly. These effects include anxiety, dizziness, feeling sick and not being able to sleep. Some people feel confused and “out of sorts”. These symptoms are less severe if you come off your MAOI slowly. It is best to discuss this with your doctor or pharmacist.

What will happen to me when I start taking my MAOI?

All antidepressants work slowly. People tend to feel better over a period of weeks rather than days. Different symptoms may get better at different times. Most people find that they feel noticeably better after about two or three weeks. However, the full effect of antidepressants is usually felt only after about four to six weeks.

It is very important to continue to take antidepressants so that the full effects can be felt. Speak to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if you have any questions about this. You might get some side effects. Many of these can be quite mild and should go away after a week or so. Look at the tables 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.

Are there any medicines that I should avoid or take care with?

Always tell your doctor and your pharmacist that you are on a MAOI antidepressant. They will need to check carefully to see if any other medicines are safe to use with your MAOI antidepressant.

Ask your pharmacist about any potential problems if you buy any medicines “over the counter” from a pharmacy, particularly if it is for a cough, cold, the ‘flu or hay fever. Do not take St. John’s Wort. These medicines can interfere with MAOIs and cause problems.

Ask for advice if you are taking strong pain-killers. Always ask your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure about any medicine. Your **MAOI Diet** leaflet also has a list of medicines to be avoided.

Are there any foods or drinks that I should avoid?

A chemical called tyramine is present in some foods. Examples include meat and fish which isn’t fresh, hard cheese, yeast extracts (e.g. Oxo, Marmite, Vegemite, Bovril), soy sauce and soy products such as tofu and miso, tap and home-brewed beer.

MAOIs can react with tyramine in these foods, causing your blood pressure to rise. This is called a hypertensive crisis. You may feel hot and flushed or have a headache. This can be dangerous. If this happens, seek urgent medical advice, for example go to an emergency department. Make a note of any foods or drinks that give you this reaction and you should avoid these in the future. Tell your doctor when you next meet. Your pharmacist can give you a leaflet which lists foods and drinks that you should avoid called **MAOI Diet**.

When I feel better, can I stop taking them?

No. If you stop taking your MAOI, your original symptoms may return. To reduce your chances of becoming depressed again, you may need to take your antidepressant for at least six months after you feel better, and sometimes longer. This is not thought to be harmful. You and your doctor should decide when you can come off it.

What about alcohol?

MAOIs can react with some alcoholic drinks and cause a rise in blood pressure. It is best to avoid tap craft beers and home-made beers. Avoid alcohol altogether for the first one or two months. After this, if you want a drink, try a glass of a drink that is safer for you and see how you feel. It pays to be very cautious because alcohol affects people in different ways, especially when they are taking medication. If your MAOI and alcohol react badly, you may feel hot and flushed. You may also get a headache. This can be dangerous. If this happens, seek urgent medical advice, for example go to the emergency department at the hospital.

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 any alcohol and drive while on MAOIs. Discuss any concerns you may have with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. Also, drinking alcohol often makes depression worse.

SIDE EFFECTS	WHAT IS IT?	WHAT SHOULD I DO IF THIS HAPPENS TO ME?
Common		
Postural Hypotension	A low blood pressure. You may feel faint when you stand up.	Try not to stand up too quickly. If you feel dizzy, don't drive. This dizziness is not dangerous.
Constipation	Feeling "bunged up" inside. You can't pass a bowel motion.	Eat more fibre, e.g. bran, fruit and vegetables. Do more walking. Make sure you drink plenty of fluid. A mild laxative from a pharmacy might help.
Drowsiness	Feeling sleepy or sluggish in the daytime.	Don't drive or use machinery. Ask your doctor if you can take your medicine at a different time.
Dry Mouth	Your mouth will feel dry and you will not produce much saliva (spit). Dry mouth can cause problems with speech, taste, chewing and swallowing. (Continued overleaf).	To help prevent dental problems sip water regularly to moisten your mouth. Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. Avoid sugary drinks and snacks between meals. Try sugar free chewing gum to stimulate saliva or discuss using an oral lubricant with your pharmacist or dentist.

	It can also the increase the risk of getting dental decay and infection in your mouth.	
Fatigue	You feel tired all the time. This may happen early on in treatment and should go away.	Tell your doctor. It may be possible to adjust your dose slightly.
Headache	When your head is pounding and painful.	It should be safe to take paracetamol. If it lasts a long time or is severe, see your doctor.
Insomnia	Not being able to sleep or stay asleep.	This can be common with tranylcypromine. Take your last daily dose by midday each day.
Sexual Dysfunction	Lack of libido. No interest in sex. Inability to maintain an erection or have an orgasm.	Discuss this with your doctor when next you meet.

Rare

Blurred Vision	Things look fuzzy and you can't focus properly.	Don't drive. See your doctor if you are worried. You won't need glasses.
Oedema	When your ankles or feet swell up.	Discuss this with your doctor when you next visit.
Skin Rashes	Blotches seen anywhere.	Stop taking your medication and see your doctor now.
Sweating	Feeling hot and sticky. Your clothes may get wet.	Contact your doctor. You will need to have your blood pressure checked.
Urinary Retention	Difficulty in passing urine or not much urine passed.	Contact your doctor now.

Tyramine Reaction

Some foods that contain tyramine will interact with MAOI antidepressants. This will cause your blood pressure to go up. You may experience a severe headache, increasing chest pain and increasing shortness of breath. There is another patient information leaflet which provides advice about what foods and drinks to avoid. If you experience this reaction, you will need to go to the emergency department at the hospital.

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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