

Mirtazapine

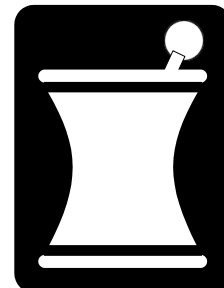
Patient Information - Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy

Why have I been prescribed Mirtazapine?

Mirtazapine belongs to 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 may be lacking in motivation and energy. Tiredness and poor sleep are very common, as are changes in appetite. Many people also find that they simply cannot enjoy any of life’s pleasures.

Depression can be treated in many ways. Antidepressants can generally be relied upon to relieve the symptoms of depression in most people. Other “talking” therapies are also effective in depression. Mirtazapine may also be helpful in treating other conditions such as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and anxiety.



How does Mirtazapine work?

Mirtazapine is a NaSSA antidepressant. NaSSA stands for Noradrenergic and Specific Serotonergic Antidepressants. They increase the amounts of chemicals (serotonin and noradrenaline) in the brain. This is shown to treat depression. Mirtazapine is the only type of NaSSA available in New Zealand. Mirtazapine is not a tranquilliser or sleeping tablet.

Is Mirtazapine safe to take?

It is usually safe to take mirtazapine 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:

- Epilepsy (seizures and fits)
- Liver disease (including jaundice) or kidney disease.
- Heart disease, angina or recently had a heart attack.
- Diabetes.
- Schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.

How should I take Mirtazapine?

- Look at the label on your medicine; it should have all the instructions on it.
- Follow this advice carefully.
- If you have any questions, speak to your pharmacist, doctor or nurse.
- They are often best taken at night, as they can make you sleepy.
- 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.
- Do not take a double dose to make up for forgotten doses.
- The tablets should be swallowed whole, with plenty of fluid.

Is Mirtazapine addictive?

Mirtazapine is not addictive. Some people may get some discontinuation effects if they stop their mirtazapine suddenly. These effects could include feeling sick, unwell, headache and not being able to sleep.

These symptoms are less severe if you come off mirtazapine slowly. It is best to discuss this with your doctor, pharmacist or nurse.

What will happen to me when I start taking Mirtazapine?

All antidepressants work slowly. You will begin 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 2-3 weeks. However, the full effect of antidepressants is usually felt after about 4-6 weeks. It is important to continue to take your antidepressant so that the full effects can be felt. Speak to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if you have any questions about this. If you have suicidal thinking, speak to your doctor or nurse or case manager.

Like all medicine, mirtazapine can have side effects but not everyone gets them. Look at the table over the page. It tells you what to do if you get any side effects. Many of these can be quite mild and should go away after a week or so.

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 other medicines I should avoid or take care with?

Always tell your doctor what you are taking and ask your pharmacist before you buy any “over-the-counter” medicines. Mirtazapine can react with a range of medicines including other antidepressants, St John’s Wort, “5-hydroxy tryptophan”, some cough mixtures, some pain relief medicine (e.g. tramadol) and migraine medicines e.g. sumatriptan

Avoid sedating antihistamines and cough and cold preparations which contain antihistamines as these may make you very sleepy.

When I feel better, can I stop taking them?

No. If you stop taking mirtazapine, 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 stop taking mirtazapine.

What about alcohol?

Initially you should not drink alcohol when taking mirtazapine. This is because both alcohol and mirtazapine can make you drowsy and clumsy. If the two are taken at the same time, severe drowsiness may result. This can lead to falls and accidents. As well as this, drinking alcohol often makes your depression worse.

Once you are used to taking the mirtazapine, you 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 does not make you feel drowsy, then it is probably okay to drink small amounts.

It pays to be 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 any alcohol and drive while on mirtazapine. Discuss any concerns you may have with your doctor, case manager or pharmacist.

SIDE EFFECT	WHAT IS IT?	WHAT SHOULD I DO IF THIS HAPPENS TO ME?
Common		
Drowsiness	Feeling sleepy or sluggish	This occurs usually during the first few weeks of treatment. Avoid tasks you need to be alert for such as driving or using machines. Discuss with your doctor.
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. It can also increase the risk of getting dental decay and infection in your mouth.	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.
Weight gain	Eating more and putting on weight.	Avoid fatty foods like chocolate, crisps and fizzy drinks. A diet of fruit and vegetables will usually help, as will physical activities such as walking. If it becomes a problem, or you are worried, ask to see a dietitian.
Sexual Dysfunction	Lack of libido or not interest in sex. Delayed orgasm.	Discuss this with your doctor. Mirtazapine usually causes less sexual dysfunction than other antidepressants.
Constipation	Feeling "bunged up" inside. Your can't pass a bowel motion.	Eat more fibre eg bran, fruit and vegetables. Do more walking. Make sure you drink plenty of fluid. A mild laxative from a pharmacy may help.
Dizziness	Feeling light-headed and faint.	Don't stand up too quickly. Try and sit or lie down when you feel it coming on. Don't drive.
Headache	When your head is pounding and painful.	You can take paracetamol to relieve this.
Sweating	Sweating more than normal especially at night.	If it is bad, contact your doctor.

Uncommon		
Nausea	The feeling in your stomach when you think you are about to vomit.	Taking each dose with or after food may help. If it is bad, contact your doctor.
Oedema	Swollen ankles caused by fluid retention.	Discuss this with your doctor when you next meet.
Rare		
Agranulocytosis	Low numbers of white cells in the blood. You may get more infections.	Tell your doctor immediately if you develop a fever, chills, sore throat, other 'flu like symptoms or mouth ulcers. You will need a blood test.
Nightmares	Unpleasant dreams.	If the nightmares are bad, contact your doctor.

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.

**Pharmacy,
Hillmorton Hospital
Annex Road Christchurch.
Telephone: (03) 339 1169**