

Tricyclic Antidepressants (Try-sigh-click)

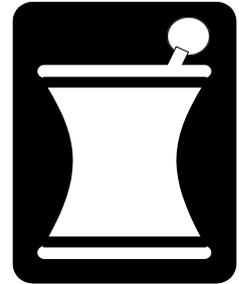
Patient Information - Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy

Why have I been prescribed a tricyclic antidepressant?

Tricyclic antidepressants are a group of medicines used to treat depression. The tricyclic antidepressants can also be helpful in treating other conditions, such as anxiety, sleep problems, panic attacks, obsessive-compulsive disorder, social phobia and some types of pain.

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. Tiredness, poor sleep and changes in appetite are very common. Many people find that they cannot enjoy any of the pleasures of life. Depression can be treated in many ways. Antidepressants are often used because they are effective for most people. Other talking therapies are also effective 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. You may need additional support or supervision. Please talk with your mental health provider immediately if these thoughts occur.



What exactly are tricyclic antidepressants?

Tricyclic antidepressants are not tranquillisers or sleeping tablets. Tricyclic antidepressants have been used for over fifty years to treat depression so there is plenty of experience with how they work. They are called “tricyclic” because of the three rings in their chemical structure. They are sometimes called “TCAs”.

Some examples of tricyclic antidepressants are amitriptyline, clomipramine, imipramine, and nortriptyline.

Are tricyclic antidepressants safe to take?

It is usually safe to take tricyclics 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, phaeochromocytoma or glaucoma, or suffer from heart, liver, thyroid, kidney or prostate trouble.
- If you have experienced seizures or have epilepsy
- If you are pregnant, breastfeeding, or wish to become pregnant.

How should I take a tricyclic antidepressant 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 pharmacist, doctor or nurse. They are best taken at night, as they can make you feel drowsy which should help you sleep. 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 tricyclic antidepressants addictive?

Tricyclic antidepressants are not addictive. Some people do get some “discontinuation” effects if they stop their tricyclic 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 tricyclic antidepressant slowly. It is best to discuss this with your doctor.

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

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. You are likely to find that you 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.

If you have suicidal thoughts during this time, speak to your doctor or nurse.

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 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 also 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 what you are taking and ask your pharmacist before buying any ‘over-the-counter’ medicines.

Tricyclic antidepressants can interact with a range of medicines including sedating antihistamines and St John’s Wort.

When I feel better, can I stop taking them?

No. If you stop taking tricyclic antidepressants, 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?

It is recommended that people taking tricyclic antidepressants should not drink alcohol. This is because both tricyclics and alcohol can make you drowsy. If the two are taken at the same time, they can cause you to be very drowsy. This can lead to falls or accidents. As well as this, drinking alcohol often makes depression worse.

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 does not 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.

It is recognised that many driving accidents occur because of mixing alcohol with medicines. This includes tricyclic antidepressants. Don't stop taking your tricyclic antidepressant just because you fancy a drink at the weekend.

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

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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SIDE EFFECT	WHAT IS IT?	WHAT SHOULD I DO IF THIS HAPPENS TO ME?
Common		
Dry mouth	Your mouth will feel dry and you will not produce much saliva (spit). Dry mouth can cause problems with speech, 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.
Blurred Vision	Things look fuzzy and you can't focus properly.	Don't drive. See your doctor if you are worried.
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.
Urinary Retention	Difficulty in passing urine, or not much urine passed.	Contact your doctor now.
Drowsiness	Feeling sleepy or sluggish in the daytime. 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 tricyclic at a different time of the day.
Weight Gain	A bigger appetite and putting on weight.	Try and avoid putting on weight by eating a healthy diet full of vegetables and fibre, and by doing physical activities such as walking. Avoid fatty foods like chocolate and crisps and high sugar foods such as cakes, sweets and fizzy drinks. Ask to see a dietitian for help with food choices.
Uncommon		
Headache	When your head is pounding and painful.	You can take paracetamol for this.
Nausea	The feeling in your stomach when you think you are about to vomit.	Taking each dose after or with food may help. If it is bad, contact your doctor.
Palpitations	A fast heartbeat.	It is not usually dangerous. It can easily be treated if it lasts a long time. Tell your doctor about it.
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.

SIDE EFFECT	WHAT IS IT?	WHAT SHOULD I DO IF IT HAPPENS TO ME?
Sexual Dysfunction	Lack of libido or no interest in sex. Unable to maintain an erection or have an orgasm.	Discuss this with your doctor when next you meet.
Sweating	Sweating more than normal, especially at night.	If it is bad, see your doctor.
Rare		
Tremor	Feeling shaky.	Contact your doctor now.