

Venlafaxine

Patient Information - Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy

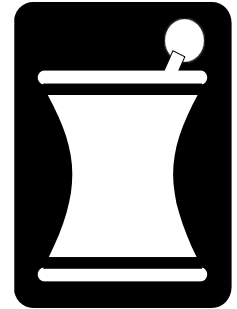
Why have I been prescribed venlafaxine?

Venlafaxine is 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. Tiredness and poor sleep are very common, and so are changes in appetite. 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.

Venlafaxine can also be useful in helping to manage other conditions, such as anxiety and panic disorders.

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. You may need additional support or supervision. Please talk with your mental health provider immediately if these thoughts occur.



What exactly is venlafaxine?

Venlafaxine is an antidepressant. It is not a tranquilliser or a sleeping tablet.

Venlafaxine is a “slow release” tablet which means that the tablets need only be taken once a day and you may get fewer side effects.

Venlafaxine works slightly differently to other antidepressants. It increases the amounts of chemicals called serotonin and noradrenaline in the brain.

Is venlafaxine safe to take?

It is usually safe to take venlafaxine 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 have epilepsy or glaucoma, or suffer from heart, liver or kidney trouble;
- If you have high blood pressure;
- If you are pregnant, breastfeeding, or wish to become pregnant.

How should I take my venlafaxine 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, pharmacist or nurse.

Your doctor will usually recommend these medicines are taken in the morning as they can give you more energy and make it more difficult to sleep at night. However occasionally some people find they get drowsy and then the medicine should be taken at night. 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.

Is venlafaxine addictive?

Venlafaxine is not addictive. Some people do get some “discontinuation” effects if they stop their venlafaxine suddenly. These effects include anxiety, dizziness, feeling sick and not being able to sleep. Some people feel confused and “out of sorts”. Others describe “electric shock” like feelings in their body. This can be avoided by reducing the dose slowly over time. Some people can get these symptoms if they miss one or two doses of their medicine, but this is uncommon. It is best to discuss this with your doctor or pharmacist.

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

All antidepressants work slowly. You are likely 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. 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 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.

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 you buy any ‘over-the-counter’ medicines. Venlafaxine can interact with a range of medicines including warfarin, lithium, other antidepressants, St John’s Wort, some cough mixtures and some pain relief medicines, in particular tramadol and sumatriptan.

When I feel better, can I stop venlafaxine?

No. If you stop taking your venlafaxine, 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 harmful. You should decide with your doctor when you can come off it.

What about alcohol?

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

Once you are used to taking your venlafaxine, 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 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 any alcohol and drive while on venlafaxine.

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. But be careful as internet-based information is not always accurate.

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

SIDE EFFECT	WHAT IS IT?	WHAT SHOULD I DO IF THIS HAPPENS TO ME?
Common		
Anxiety	Feeling nervous or being on edge	This should go away with time. If worried, contact your doctor.
Constipation	Feeling "bunged up" inside. You can't pass a motion.	Eat more fibre (bran, fruit, vegetables). Do more walking. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for a mild laxative.
Diarrhoea	The "runs", or loose stools.	This should wear off fairly quickly. If a problem, contact your doctor or pharmacist.
Dizziness	Feeling light-headed.	This should wear off in time. If it is bad, contact your doctor.

SIDE EFFECT	WHAT IS IT?	WHAT SHOULD I DO IF THIS HAPPENS TO ME?
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 venlafaxine at a different time.
Headache	Your head is pounding and painful.	This should wear off fairly quickly. You can take paracetamol for this.
Insomnia	Not able to sleep at night.	Discuss this with your doctor. You may be able to take your venlafaxine at a different time of the day.
Nausea	The feeling you get when you want to vomit.	Taking each dose with or after food may help. If it is bad, contact your doctor.
Sweating	Sweating more than normal, especially at night.	If it is bad, see your doctor.
Fairly Common		
Sexual Dysfunction	Lack of libido or no interest in sex. Inability to maintain an erection or have an orgasm	Discuss this with your doctor when next you meet.
Uncommon		
Blurred Vision	Things look fuzzy and you can't focus properly.	See your doctor if you are worried. Don't drive when your vision is blurred.
Hypertension	High blood pressure.	This usually only happens if you are taking a higher dose of venlafaxine. Your doctor will check for this.
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.
Rash or Urticaria	Blotches everywhere on your skin.	Stop taking venlafaxine and contact your doctor now.
Tremor	Feeling shaky.	Contact your doctor now.
Vomiting	Being sick	If it is bad contact your doctor. Take your capsules with food.
Rare		
Bruxism	Teeth grinding or jaw clenching	If you develop teeth grinding or jaw clenching tell your doctor as your dose may need to be adjusted.