Amitriptyline

Why have I been prescribed Amitriptyline?

You have been prescribed Amitriptyline as a treatment for your pain. Amitriptyline is usually reserved for pain that remains troublesome despite standard painkillers such as Paracetamol and Codeine. It is often used for neuropathic pain ('neuralgia' or 'nerve pain'), for low back pain, or when pain causes sleep disturbance.

Amitriptyline is an antidepressant – is this a problem?

Amitriptyline is licensed as an antidepressant medication, and not specifically as a painkiller. However, there is good clinical evidence that Amitriptyline can be effective in treating certain types of persistent pain, using much lower doses than usually used for depression.

How effective is Amitriptyline in treating pain?

Amitriptyline does not help everyone. Clinical trials show that about one in three patients will experience a significant improvement in pain levels.

What is the usual dose?

The most effective dose varies quite a lot between individuals, but is usually between 10mg and 30mg.

It often takes up to two weeks for Amitriptyline to start reducing pain, so you will need to be patient as the dose is gradually increased. **The usual starting dose is 10mg in the evening**. This can be gradually increased to find the most effective and best tolerated dose. We normally suggest **building up the dose no quicker than by 10mg every two weeks,** always taken in the evening.

When in hindsight an increase in dose did not lead to a clear extra benefit, go back to the lower dose. In this way, decide the dose that gives the best balance between benefit and side effects.

Continued overleaf...

What are the side effects?

Most medications can cause side-effects in some patients. Side-effects are more likely with higher doses. This is the reason for increasing the dose gradually.

Mild side-effects such as drowsiness, dry mouth and constipation are fairly common when first starting Amitriptyline and often settle as you become accustomed to the medication. Amitriptyline needs to be used with care in patients with glaucoma, prostate problems, diabetes and palpitations. Please read the information leaflet that is enclosed with your medication for a full list of side-effects.

If the drug makes you drowsy, do not drive. Alcohol is permissible but will make you more drowsy when taking Amitriptyline.

How long will I need to take Amitriptyline?

If Amitriptyline helps your pain you may need to continue on a 'maintenance dose'. We recommend reducing the dose every 4-6 months. Reduce or stop the drug for 2 weeks, then decide if it had been helping sufficiently to merit re-starting the drug.

If amitriptyline does not bring significantly more benefit than side effects, please stop taking

What if I decide to stop Amitriptyline?

To prevent unpleasant symptoms, usually of disturbed sleep, we suggest the dose is reduced by 10mg each week.

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