

## Pain Service

# Frequently asked questions about Tricyclics for pain/sleep

### Why do I need a Tricyclic?

Tricyclics are a family of medicines which include Amitriptyline, Dothiepin, Dosulepin, Imipramine, Lofepamine and Nortriptyline.

### You have been prescribed:

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Tricyclics are used to treat nerve pain. This type of pain is often not relieved by normal painkillers. Tricyclics can be used in combination with other painkillers to improve your pain relief.

When pain goes on for long periods of time it can interfere with your usual sleep pattern so that you do not wake in the morning feeling refreshed. This in turn can make it more difficult to cope with pain so sleep is disturbed further. This vicious circle can eventually lead to a state where pain is badly controlled and sleep is poor.

### Are Tricyclics used for treating depression?

Yes, they are used for treating depression, but research has shown that they are also effective in helping pain. The doses used for improving pain and sleep patterns are much smaller than those used for depression.

Remember, the aim of treatment is:

- To reduce pain
- Help to establish a sleep pattern
- Break the vicious circle of pain.

### How do Tricyclics work?

You should notice that your pain starts to improve over one to two weeks after starting a Tricyclic. It may be six weeks or longer before you begin to notice any improvement in your sleep pattern. Some people feel the benefit straight away.

## How long will I have to take a Tricyclic for?

We recommend you take this medication for at least three months. If it is helpful you may need to take it for many months, so you will need a repeat prescription from your GP. Your treatment will be reviewed in hospital by the doctors and pain relief service looking after you. If you are discharged then your GP should review your treatment, you may also have had an appointment made for you to visit a specialist pain clinic.

There is no possibility of you becoming addicted to the tablets. It is also important that you continue taking your regular painkillers, unless you have been advised to stop taking these by your doctor.

## How should I take a Tricyclic?

You should take a Tricyclic in addition to your current tablets unless you are told otherwise.

- You should take the tablet(s) as a single dose at night-time.
- Take the tablet(s) about one hour before you usually go to sleep.
- If you feel drowsy first thing in the morning, you should take the tablets earlier in the evening.
- Sometimes the dose will need to be adjusted to find the right dose for you. This will be done by your hospital doctor, pain service or GP.

## Do I need any tests whilst I am taking a Tricyclic?

No, you will not need any special checks whilst you are taking this medication.

## Are there any side effects?

All drugs have side effects, but not everyone will experience them. Side effects will usually appear soon after you start taking the medication, but they should become less troublesome by the end of the first week.

The most common side effects of a Tricyclic are:

- A dry mouth
- Drowsiness (this is why the tablets should be taken at night).
- Other side effects are detailed on the drug information leaflet supplied with the tablets.

## Can I drink alcohol whilst taking a Tricyclic?

If the Tricyclic makes you feel tired or gives you other side effects, then drinking alcohol may increase these side effects. Because of this, we advise you to avoid drinking alcohol if these side effects are troublesome.

## **Is it safe for me to drive whilst I'm taking a Tricyclic?**

Tricyclics may cause drowsiness. If you feel affected by this, we advise you not to drive until the effects have worn off.

## **Is it safe for me to take other medicines whilst I'm receiving treatment with a Tricyclic?**

Before you take or buy any new medicines, including herbal remedies, tell your doctor or Pharmacist that you are taking a Tricyclic and ask their advice.

## **What should I do if I forget to take a dose?**

This medication is normally taken in the evening. If you forget or skip a dose, then continue as normal the next day. **Do not** try to double up to make up for your missed dose.

### **Remember:**

Never give your prescribed tablets to other people as they may not be safe for them to take. Any leftover tablets should be taken to your local pharmacy for safe disposal.

## **Keep all medicines out of reach of children**

### **Additional information**

The information in this leaflet is not intended to replace the advice given to you by your doctor or the pain service looking after you. If you require more information or have any questions, please speak to your doctor or contact the Pain Clinic.

Telephone number: 01223 217796



We are currently working towards a smoke free site. Smoking is only permitted in the designated smoking areas.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

## Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or

[patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)



## Document history

Authors	The Pain Service
Department	Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 0QQ <a href="http://www.cuh.org.uk">www.cuh.org.uk</a>
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