

# AMITRIPTYLINE FOR NERVE PAIN

Nerve pain (also called neuropathic pain) is caused by damage or injury to nerves from conditions like shingles, diabetes, stroke and HIV. Nerve pain is different from other types of pain and simple pain medicines have little effect. Low doses of medicines that normally treat depression and epilepsy are more effective – this includes amitriptyline.

## How does amitriptyline work?

Amitriptyline works specifically to relieve nerve pain by 'turning down' increased pain signals to the brain. It corrects the imbalance of certain chemicals in the brain (noradrenaline and serotonin) by stopping them from moving into nerve endings.<sup>1</sup>

## What are the benefits of amitriptyline?

### It is tried and true

Amitriptyline has been used for more than 20 years to effectively treat nerve pain.<sup>1-5</sup> Even though there are newer nerve pain medicines, amitriptyline is still a first choice for many patients.<sup>3</sup>

### It can relieve pain at small doses

Amitriptyline relieves nerve pain at smaller doses (25–75 mg) than those used to treat depression (150–300 mg).<sup>6</sup> This means that there is less chance of possible side effects.<sup>7</sup>

## What to expect with amitriptyline

Nerve pain medicines do not work for all patients, and often don't remove pain completely when they do work. The goal of treating nerve pain with medicines is to reduce pain to allow you to improve your functioning and quality of life.

### ✓ Start low

People usually start amitriptyline at a low once-daily dose of 10 mg to 25 mg.<sup>1,8,9</sup> Taking it during the evening helps with the common side effect of drowsiness (which can be a bonus for people who have trouble sleeping).

### ✓ Go slow

Your GP may need to slowly increase your daily dose until there is good pain control. The right dose will be different for everyone.

### ✓ Give it 'a fair go' – it takes 6–8 weeks to work

You may have some pain relief at 1–2 weeks<sup>1</sup> but it might take you 6–8 weeks to experience the full effects.<sup>10</sup> Don't give up too soon.

### ✓ Monitor

Monitoring your level of pain and how your body is responding to amitriptyline is important.

### ✓ Review regularly

You may need to see your GP regularly when you start taking amitriptyline. If you've given amitriptyline a fair go and your symptoms are not improving, don't stop taking your medicine. Go back and see your GP.



## Taking amitriptyline safely

Some medicines, such as the pain medicine tramadol, or other medicines to treat depression and epilepsy, should not be taken with amitriptyline. Make sure you tell your health professional about all the medicines you are taking.

- ▶ Amitriptyline may increase the risk of seizures if you have epilepsy or a history of seizures.<sup>11</sup>
- ▶ Amitriptyline should not be taken if you have heart disease or glaucoma.<sup>11</sup>
- ▶ Be careful drinking alcohol while taking amitriptyline.
- ▶ Do not drive or operate machinery until you know how amitriptyline affects you because it can cause drowsiness.

## There may be side effects

Like all medicines, amitriptyline may have side effects. Common side effects include drowsiness, dry mouth, blurred vision, pupil dilation, constipation, weight gain and urinary retention.<sup>10,11</sup> You will find a complete list of the side effects on the consumer medicine information (CMI) leaflet.

Some side effects, such as blurred vision, drowsiness and dry mouth, can get better over time. If you are having trouble with the side effects of amitriptyline, talk to a health professional.

## Keep good records

It is important for you to monitor your nerve pain so you can actively manage your condition with your health professional. Use a diary or the MedicineWise app to:

- ▶ help you remember to take your amitriptyline
- ▶ record your pain symptoms regularly
- ▶ note any side effects.

## Pain management

Medicines are just one option when it comes to managing nerve pain. Other strategies include social support, psychological support and physical therapies. Other ways to help you live with nerve pain include:

- ▶ setting realistic goals for pain management
- ▶ staying active and eating a balanced diet to maintain physical wellbeing
- ▶ joining a support group for pain management.



References available online at: [nps.org.au/np-patient-refs](https://nps.org.au/np-patient-refs)

## Further information

- ▶ Australian Pain Management Association (<https://www.painmanagement.org.au/>)
- ▶ Pain Australia (<http://www.painaustralia.org.au/>)
- ▶ Amitriptyline CMI via NPS Medicine Finder ([www.nps.org.au/medical-info/medicine-finder](http://www.nps.org.au/medical-info/medicine-finder))
- ▶ NPS Medicinewise [nps.org.au](https://nps.org.au)
- ▶ Medicines Line (1300 MEDICINE)

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