

Amitriptyline

(am – ee – TRIP – till – een)

How this medication is used

Amitriptyline has other names but one of the most common is Elavil[®]. It is used to treat chronic pain, by working with the body's built in pain system. Although it can help with many different pains, it is very useful for nerve injury (neuropathic) pain. This type of pain feels like burning or electric sensations. This medication helps to balance chemicals in the brain.

Reminders

- Tell your doctor if you are taking medications for depression. Amitriptyline should not be used with monoamine oxidase inhibiting (MAOI) drugs such as phenelzine, tranlycypromine, moclobemide or selegiline within the past 2 weeks. High fever, seizures and even death can occur when these drugs are used together.
- While taking Amitriptyline, you may not have pain relief right away. It may take 2 to 4 weeks to work. The dose may need to be increased. Do not stop it but continue with it until you meet with the doctor. Talk with your pharmacist if you have any questions about taking Amitriptyline.
- Cimetidine (Tagamet) can increase blood levels of amitriptyline and its side effects.
- Alcohol blocks the anti-depressant action of Amitriptyline.

How to take this medication

- Take this medication exactly as directed by your doctor. It must be taken regularly, even if you feel well. Do not stop taking this medication without checking with your doctor first.
- Amitriptyline is usually started at a low dose and increased gradually. If you are only taking it once a day, take at bedtime since it can make you feel sleepy.
- If you miss a dose of this medication, take it as soon as possible. However, if it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and take at your regular schedule. Do not take 2 doses at one time.
- If a once daily bedtime dose is missed, do not take it in the morning since it may cause drowsiness.

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While taking this medication you may notice

- **Trouble with sleeping.**
- **Blurred vision** for up to 1 week.
- **A dry mouth.** Suck on sugar-free candy or ice chips or chew sugar-free gum. Good care of your teeth is very important. Check with your pharmacist for over-the-counter products available that may help.
- **Dizziness.** Get up slowly when you have been sitting or lying down. If you feel dizzy, sit or lie down until you are no longer dizzy, then get up slowly.
- **Drowsiness.** Until you know how it affects you, do not drive or operate machinery.
- **Increased effects of alcohol.** Making you more sleepy, dizzy and lightheaded. Do not drink alcohol (wine, beer and liquor) while on this medication.
- **Constipation.** To prevent constipation, eat food high in fibre, drink plenty of fluids (6 to 8 glasses) each day and exercise regularly. Food high in fibre includes whole grain products, vegetables and fruit. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about laxatives or stool softeners.
- **Nausea or upset stomach.** Take with food.
- **Loss of strength.**
- **Increased appetite and weight gain.** To avoid weight gain, follow a healthy diet and exercise plan. Talk to your doctor or dietitian for help.

Most of these effects will go away as your body gets used to the medication.

Contact your doctor or seek medical help if you notice

- blurred vision for more than 1 week
- problems passing urine
- severe constipation
- sexuality changes
- your heartbeat is not regular
- continued restlessness
- muscle tremor
- continued muscle stiffness
- signs of infection such as sore throat, fever, chills