



Clozapine

What is Clozapine?

Clozapine belongs to the group of medicines called antipsychotics. It is used to manage the symptoms of schizophrenia when other treatments have not worked, or have produced severe side effects.

What dose do I need?

Clozapine comes in tablet form and is taken by mouth one to three times a day. It should be taken as prescribed by your doctor. Follow the instructions on the label and ask your doctor or pharmacist to explain any directions you do not understand. You should not take more or less than the prescribed amount without checking with your doctor.

The first dose will be given under medical supervision, usually in a hospital. Your dose will be gradually adjusted. It might take some weeks or months before you obtain full benefit.

If you miss a dose and you remember soon after, take the dose and space the rest of the day's doses evenly. If it is close to the next dose, do not double up; just take the next scheduled dose. If you miss more than 2 days of clozapine contact your doctor; they may want you to start at a reduced dose.

If you take too much clozapine you should contact Poisons Information on 13 11 26 or the local emergency services. Do this even if there are no signs of discomfort or poisoning. You may need urgent medical attention.

How long do I need to take Clozapine for?

This medicine may need to be used for a long time. You should continue to take clozapine even after you feel well as it is used not only to **get** you well, but also to **keep** you well. Do not stop taking the medicine without talking to your doctor, especially if you have been taking it for some time.

Are there any special precautions?

Before taking clozapine you should tell your doctor if:

- you are allergic to clozapine or any other drugs;
- you are taking any other prescription or non-

prescription medicines, including herbal or natural medicines, medicines from the supermarket or health food store or taking other substances;

- you have ever had blood disorders, heart, kidney or liver disease, epilepsy, urinary or prostate problems, glaucoma, irregular heartbeat, blood pressure problems, or problems with your blood caused by clozapine;
- you are pregnant, planning to become pregnant or breast feeding an infant (you should also contact your doctor if you become pregnant while taking clozapine);
- you use tobacco products (smoking can reduce the effectiveness of clozapine).

You should also be aware that clozapine can make you drowsy and alcohol can add to this drowsiness. If you if you require surgery (including dentistry), it is important to advise medical professionals that you are taking clozapine.

Does it need monitoring?

Clozapine can cause a serious blood problem. Your doctor will order blood tests to monitor for any changes.

You will have to have blood tests at least weekly for the first 18 weeks and monthly thereafter while taking clozapine and for 4 weeks after you stop taking it. If your doctor is concerned you may need extra blood tests.

What are the common side effects?

Many of the side effects of clozapine are **more common at the start of treatment and lessen in severity over time**. They are also associated with increasing the dose too quickly. Starting the dose low and gradually increasing it reduces the risk of experiencing unwanted effects. Following are some of the most common side effects experienced.

- **Sedation** may be troublesome. Giving most of the dose at night may help, or a dose change may be required.
- **Increased saliva production** may be bothersome at night. See your doctor if this is a problem.

- **Constipation** can be a persistent problem. A diet high in fibre, drinking plenty of water and moderate exercise are recommended.
- **Light-headedness**, dizziness or giddiness on standing. If you get dizzy on standing, sit down, wait a little, then slowly get up again.
- **A fast heartbeat** (tachycardia) is common in the first few weeks of treatment. It usually goes away. Contact your doctor if it persists or if you experience chest pain or breathlessness at the same time.
- **Weight gain** can be a problem especially in the first year of treatment. Maintaining a healthy diet and getting plenty of exercise is recommended. Your doctor can assist you in

“You must have regular blood tests or your doctor cannot prescribe Clozapine”

obtaining dietary advice.

- **High temperature** can occur in the first couple of weeks of treatment. It usually wears off. **See your doctor to make sure there is no other cause such as an infection.**
- **Nausea** can occur in the first weeks of treatment. An anti-nauseant medication may be needed.
- **Nocturnal urinary incontinence** (bedwetting) can occur at any time during treatment. Changing the night dose of clozapine or limiting fluid intake before bedtime can be helpful. See your doctor if it continues.

What about rare side effects?

- A serious blood disorder known as **agranulocytosis** can occur in 1% of people taking clozapine. This is a condition where the number of white blood cells in your body is reduced. This is important because white blood cells are needed to fight infection. There is no way of knowing who may develop this condition. Regular blood tests will ensure early detection of the condition should it develop. Clozapine will be ceased and white cell numbers should return to normal.
- **Myocarditis** (swelling or inflammation of the

heart muscle) has been associated with clozapine treatment but is very rare. Contact your doctor immediately if you develop a fast or irregular heartbeat that is present even when resting; together with rapid breathing, shortness of breath, dizziness or light-headedness, or chest pain. You may need to be referred to a cardiologist.

- Clozapine may cause **seizures**. They can occur at any stage in treatment and are often dose or dose-increase related. If they occur your dose may need to be reduced or you may need medication to control the seizures.
- Clozapine can cause **high blood sugar levels** (hyperglycaemia). Contact your doctor immediately if you experience any of the following: thirst, dry mouth, flushing, dry skin, frequent urination, loss of appetite, trouble breathing.
- Be sure you know how you react to clozapine before operating machinery, driving a car or doing anything else that may be dangerous

If you experience **any of the following symptoms** contact your doctor immediately:

tremors, seizures or convulsions, difficulty urinating or loss of bladder control, confusion, eye pain, shakiness, chest pain, severe muscle stiffness, sore throat, unusual bleeding or bruising, upset stomach, vomiting, loss of appetite, or yellowness of the skin or eyes.

Are there medicines I should not take with clozapine?

Clozapine should not usually be taken with other medicines that can:

- affect your white blood cells;
- cause seizures;
- cause drowsiness or sedation.

Check with your doctor or pharmacist to make sure your medicines are safe to use with Clozapine.

Research Programs

Visit our website or request an Annual Report to learn more about related research in the:

- Molecular Psychopharmacology Laboratory;
- Pharmacogenomics Project.

Information Service

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