

Know Your Medicines

Lamotrigine

The purpose of this leaflet is to give you some general information on lamotrigine, and is intended as a guide only.

This should be read in conjunction with the official patient information leaflet, supplied with the medication.

You may find out more information from other sources. Remember some sources of information are more accurate than others. Your healthcare professional may be able to point you in the right direction or give you further information

Why have I been prescribed lamotrigine?

Lamotrigine is used to treat depression associated with a bipolar illness when other treatments have not been effective and then keep you well. You may wish to discuss this with your prescriber who will be able to give you more information.

Medication is just part of the management of this illness. Other therapies are also helpful; you may wish to discuss these with your prescriber.

What exactly is lamotrigine?

In this instance, lamotrigine is being used as an anti-depressant or mood stabiliser. It is not a tranquilliser or sleeping tablet. It comes in a variety of strengths, both as tablets and dispersible tablets.

When you open the box and read the information leaflet you will notice that it talks about epilepsy but it is also licensed to be used for the prevention of depression in bipolar disorder. You may wish to discuss this with your prescriber.

Is lamotrigine safe to take?

It is usually safe to take as prescribed by your health professional but like many medicines will not suit everyone. Let your prescriber know beforehand if any of the following apply to you:

- If you are taking other medication; this includes prescribed medication or any medicines you have bought over the counter from a pharmacy including any herbal remedies.
- If you are pregnant, breast feeding, or wishing to become pregnant.
- Previously had a reaction or rash when taking this medication or other anti-epileptic medication
- Taking the contraceptive pill or other form of contraceptive
- Suffer from liver or kidney disease
- Suffer from Parkinson's disease

Your prescriber will need to carry out some routine blood tests both before and during treatment to make sure there are no problems. They will discuss these with you.

What is the usual dose of lamotrigine?

The normal dose of lamotrigine is 100mg to 400mg, taken once daily, or split in two doses. To reduce the risk of developing serious side effects the prescriber will start you on a very low dose and only very gradually increase it. It may take a few months to reach the final dose.

How should I take my lamotrigine?

Follow the directions on the label. If you have any questions ask your pharmacist, nurse or prescriber. You should also read the information leaflet supplied with the medication.

What should I do if I miss a dose?

If you miss a dose and it is within a few hours of the normal time, continue to take it as normal. If it is longer, miss the dose and continue as normal when the next dose is due. Never double up on the dose.

When I feel better, can I stop taking lamotrigine?

No, if you stop your lamotrigine too early, your symptoms may return. To reduce the chances of this happening, it is advised you should continue to take it for at least 6 months after you become well, and sometimes longer. You should discuss this with your prescriber.

Is lamotrigine addictive?

Current literature does not suggest that lamotrigine is addictive

What will happen to me when I start taking lamotrigine?

All anti-depressants work slowly and in this case, it will take a while to get to an effective dose. Although some people notice a change in the first week, normally it will take several weeks for the anti-depressant to have its full effect.

As with all anti-depressants, careful observations need to be made in the first few weeks of treatment to look for any increase in suicidal thoughts which may occur

As with all medication, lamotrigine does have side effects. You may well experience these before you start feeling the benefits. Most side effects are short lived and will pass with time. The following table contains some of the more common and more important side effects of lamotrigine and what to do about them. It is not a complete list and not everyone will get all of those listed. Ask your pharmacist, nurse or prescriber if you are worried about anything else you notice that you think might be a side effect.

Side Effect	What is it?	What should I do if it happens to me?
Very common (more than 1 in 10 people)		
Headache		Ask your local pharmacist for suitable pain relief, discuss it with your prescriber if it is a problem
Common (between 1 in 10 and 1 in 100 people)		
Problems sleeping	Insomnia	Discuss it with your prescriber if it is a problem
Dizziness or feeling light headed		Discuss it with your prescriber if it is a problem

Feeling sick	Nausea	Discuss it with your prescriber if it is a problem, take it with food.
The runs/loose stools	Diarrhoea	Discuss it with your prescriber if it is a problem
Feeling irritable or aggressive		Discuss it with your prescriber if it is a problem and doesn't go away
General aches and pains	Muscle or joint pain	Ask your local pharmacist for suitable pain relief, discuss it with your prescriber if it is a problem

Uncommon (between 1 in 100 and 1 in 1,000 people)

Double vision or blurred vision	Diplopia	Discuss it with your prescriber if it is a problem
Unsteadiness or loss of co-ordination when walking	Ataxia	Discuss it with your prescriber, they may need to reduce the dose

Rare (between 1 in 1,000 and 1 in 10,000 people)

Unexpected skin reactions, such as rash, sore mouth or eyes	Allergic reaction, Stevens-Johnson syndrome	Contact your prescriber immediately
Redness of the eye	Conjunctivitis	Discuss it with your prescriber if it is a problem
Yellowing of the skin, itching, stomach pain or tenderness	Possible liver problems	Contact your prescriber immediately

Very rare (less than 1 in 10,000 people)

Swelling around the face	Allergic reaction	Contact your prescriber immediately
Feeling unusually tired, have unexpected bruising, develop a sore throat or have more infections than usual, swollen lymph glands	Possible effect on the blood or sensitivity reaction	Contact your prescriber immediately
Seeing things that aren't there	Hallucinations	Discuss this with your prescriber
Being agitated or confused		Discuss it with your prescriber if it is a problem and doesn't go away
Worsening of symptoms of Parkinson's disease		Discuss it with your prescriber
Movements you can't control such as irregular jerking or shaking		Discuss this with your prescriber

Frequency not known (cannot be estimated from the available data)

High temperature/flu-like symptoms		Contact your prescriber immediately
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Your prescriber will carry out regular blood tests to monitor for any changes and will discuss the results with you. The main reason for the very slow dose increase is to avoid the skin reactions, in particular Stevens-Johnson syndrome. Certain medications may slow this dose even more e.g. valproate, or speed it up e.g. carbamazepine.

What about alcohol?

Ideally do not drink alcohol when taking this medication. This is because taking them together can make you drowsier, sometimes severely. There is no safe drink and drive limit when taking this medication. Once people have been taking this medication for some time, they may be able to take small amounts of alcohol. Try a small amount in a safe environment and see how you feel. Ideally get someone else to tell you.

Lamotrigine stays in the body a long time, so there is no point missing a tablet to have a drink.

Pharmacy Team
RDASH
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If you want further information please ring:

Pharmacy Services: 01302 798307
Name: No.

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