

## Know Your Medicines

# Quetiapine

*The purpose of this leaflet is to give you some general information about quetiapine and 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 should be able to point you in the right direction or give you further information.*

### **What is quetiapine?**

Quetiapine is a drug which belongs to a group of drugs called anti-psychotics. Its brand name is Seroquel®.

### **Why have I been prescribed quetiapine?**

Quetiapine is used to treat a variety of mental health problems such as psychosis, mania or bipolar depression, as well as additional treatment in severe depression. Your health care professional should have given you some information to read about your condition and given you a chance to discuss it.

The medication should reduce the occurrence or severity of your symptoms but should be given as part of an overall package of care that also includes attention to psychological and social issues.

### **Is quetiapine safe to take?**

It is usually safe to be prescribed regularly but as with all medicines does not suit everyone. Let your prescriber know if any of the following apply to you as extra care may be needed:

- Pregnant, breast feeding or wishing to become pregnant
- Heart disease or low blood pressure
- Liver disease
- Diabetes
- Epilepsy (fits or seizures)
- Blood disorders (low white blood cell count)
- Stroke or "mini" stroke
- If you are taking other medication; this includes any prescribed medication or any medicines you have bought over the counter from a pharmacy, including any herbal remedies

Your prescriber will want to carry out some routine blood tests to make sure that there are no problems before starting the medication and periodically throughout treatment to make sure things are all right.

**What is the usual dose of quetiapine and how should I take it?**

The usual dose is up to 800mg daily for psychosis, normally taken as a divided dose morning and evening. For additional treatment in severe depression the usual maximum dose is 300mg daily, for bipolar depression the usual dose is up to 600mg daily and for mania the dose may go up to 800mg. You should follow the instructions on the box. It comes in tablet form.

**What should I do if I miss a dose?**

If you forget a dose, as long as it is within a few hours of when you normally take it, then take it. If it is longer, then miss that dose and continue taking it as prescribed. Do not double up doses.

**Is quetiapine addictive?**

There is no current evidence suggesting that quetiapine is addictive, but it can cause 'withdrawal' or discontinuation effects if stopped suddenly, or rarely if a few doses are missed. These effects can include anxiety, dizziness, feeling sick and problems sleeping. Other people describe feeling confused or 'out of sorts'. To help reduce the chance of this happening, the quetiapine should be slowly stopped over a period of weeks. You may wish to speak to your prescriber, pharmacist or nurse about this.

**What will happen when I start taking my quetiapine?**

Some symptoms may improve after a few days but other symptoms may take several weeks to start improving. Most people will feel more relaxed and calm in the early stages. Normally, people will need to take the medication for six to eight weeks for the full effect to become apparent and improvements can continue beyond this. If you are taking quetiapine for any type of depression, 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 medications quetiapine does have side effects. You may notice these before you start improving. Side effects are more common at higher doses. Generally side effects are short lived. Not everyone gets the same side effects. Below is a table that lists some of the usual side effects and what you can do about them. If you develop any side effects during treatment that worry you, you should talk to your prescriber, nurse or pharmacist about them.

<b>Side Effect</b>	<b>What is it?</b>	<b>What should I do if it happens to me?</b>
<b>Very Common (more than 1 in 10)</b>		
Feeling sleepy or slowed down, it may last several hours after taking your dose	Drowsiness	Don't drive or use machinery. Consider taking the medication at night, this will usually settle with time.

## Know Your Medicines: Quetiapine

Little or no saliva	Dry mouth	Consider sucking sugar free sweets, chewing gum or eating citrus fruits. Your prescriber may be able to prescribe something or alter the dose
Putting on weight	Weight gain	Normally seen in the first few weeks of treatment. You may wish to discuss diet or exercise
More significant changes in your triglycerides or cholesterol		Your prescriber will carry out routine blood tests and advise you of any changes
Feeling dizzy	Possible effect on blood pressure	It should settle down, get up slowly, discuss this with your prescriber if it becomes an issue.

### Common (between 1 in 100 and 1 in 10)

Feeling 'bunched up' inside, can't pass a motion	Constipation	Eat more fibre e.g. bran or fruit and vegetables. Make sure you drink plenty of water or juice. If it becomes a problem discuss this with your prescriber.
More significant changes in your blood sugar		Your prescriber will carry out routine blood tests and advise you of any changes
Swollen ankles or arms	Peripheral oedema	Can occur at higher doses, speak to your prescriber when you next see them.
Stomach upset	Indigestion	Try taking the medication with meals.
Generally feeling weak or tired		It should settle down, discuss this with your prescriber if it becomes an issue.
Low blood pressure when you get up suddenly, you may feel dizzy or light headed or even fainting	Postural hypotension	Try not to get up suddenly; it normally passes after a few days. If it doesn't speak to your prescriber, if affected avoid driving until you have spoken to your prescriber.

**Know Your Medicines: Quetiapine**

Rapid heart beat	Tachycardia	Your prescriber may wish to carry out a heart tracing, especially if you have any history of heart problems.
Dizziness and movement disorders including feeling restless all the time	Akathisia, parkinsonism, extrapyramidal side effects	If these occur, normally at higher doses, then discuss these with your prescriber.
Dry or stuffy nose	Rhinitis	It should settle down, discuss this with your prescriber if it becomes an issue.
Changes in your blood	Leucopenia	Your prescriber will carry out routine blood tests and advise you of any changes.

**Uncommon (between 1 in 100 and 1 in 1000)**

Swelling of throat, itching or rash	Allergic reaction	Stop taking the medication and contact your prescriber immediately.
Having a fit or seizure	Seizures	Stop taking the medication and contact your prescriber immediately.
Your liver is not working as normal; you may not feel any symptoms. This would be picked up by a blood test	Altered liver function	As part of your ongoing treatment your prescriber will take periodic blood tests to check everything is all right.

**Rare and very rare (less than 1 in 1000)**

More significant changes in your blood sugar		Your prescriber will carry out routine blood tests and advise you of any changes.
Painful erection	Priapism	Contact your prescriber as soon as possible
Your pancreas is not working as normal; you may not feel any symptoms. This would be picked up by a blood test	Altered pancreas function	As part of your ongoing treatment your prescriber will take periodic blood tests to check everything is all right
Combination of temperature, stiffness, fast breathing, sweating, confusion	Possible neuroleptic malignant syndrome	Contact your prescriber as soon as possible

This list is not a complete list of all known side effects. If you notice anything else you are not sure of, speak to your prescriber, nurse or pharmacist. You should read this together with the package insert.

**What about alcohol?**

Taking alcohol with quetiapine can make you drowsier, sometimes severely. There is no safe drink and drive limit when taking this medication.

**When I feel better can I stop taking quetiapine?**

You should always discuss with your prescriber before deciding if and when to stop taking the medication. If you stop the medication, although you may feel better to start with, there is a risk that your symptoms may return. This may take three to six months before it becomes obvious.

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