

Patient Information Leaflet

## **Amitriptyline/Nortryptiline Tablets for Chronic Pain Relief**

Prepared by: The Chronic Pain Relief Service



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**If you require this leaflet in another language, large print or another format, please contact the Quality Team, telephone 01983 534850, who will advise you.**

Amitriptyline and Nortriptyline are medicines used to treat depression and relieve chronic pain. They are often helpful for nerve related pain, for high pain sensitivity (also called central sensitisation) and if pain is leading to sleep disruption. Their effect is different from standard pain killers, so are often prescribed in combination.

As they affect the central nervous system in complex ways, the effect often takes a while to be felt and requires regular intake. Amitriptyline and Nortriptyline won't help your pain if taken as needed. We recommend a trial of at least four weeks to judge the pain relief effect. If good, it may be taken on a regular long-term basis; if there is no distinct relief they should be discontinued after the trial period.

If you suffer from any cardiac (heart) arrhythmia, please let the doctor know as the drugs can rarely cause or worsen an arrhythmic heartbeat. The main side effect of Amitriptyline/Nortriptyline is drowsiness/hangover; therefore the best time to take it is in the evening. This has the added advantage of helping you to sleep. The other most noticeable side effect that people find is a dry mouth. A glass of water beside the bed at night will help and during the day sugar-free lozenges or similar can help. Other rare side effects are vision blurring and urine retention.

**We suggest that you avoid driving for at least 2 days after starting or changing the dose of this medication. If you work or otherwise need to be focused during the week, it might be a good idea to start the first dose on a Friday night.**

To minimise initial side effects, we recommend starting with a low dose of 10mg every night. This should be gradually increased up to 50mg taken in one dose at night, until you feel relief of your symptoms are until side effects are felt. At that stage stop increasing the dose and reduce by 10mg if you continue to have side effects. (see table below)

### **Interactions**

High doses of Amitriptyline or Nortriptyline (50mg per day or more) combined with drugs such as Tramadol, Duloxetine, Trazodone or other anti-depressants can cause more side effects, usually drowsiness. Very rarely, combinations of the above drugs can cause a Serotonin-Syndrome. Early signs of this would be muscle jerks, newly started shaking or muscle rigidity which can lead on to fever, confusion, agitation.

Should you take Amitriptyline/Nortriptyline together with any of the above medicines you should be aware of these early warning signs and we recommend to avoid high doses (e.g. Amitriptyline/Nortriptyline should be limited to 50mg daily and Tramadol to 200-300mg daily). Many patients will tolerate a combination of higher doses, but this should be monitored with the above warning signs in mind.

### **Starting Amitriptyline or Nortriptyline**

First week	10mg	Every night
Second week	20mg	Every night
Third week	30mg	Every night

Fourth week	40mg	Every night
Fifth week	50mg	Every night

Remember to stop increasing the dose when your symptoms improve or if side effects become strong (in that case reduce the current daily dose by 10mg).

**Some other points**

- There are 25mg and 50mg tablets available; once you have found “your” dose, see your GP to replace your 10mg tablets with some of the stronger ones so you don’t have to swallow as many tablets.
- Amitriptyline is not addictive and the doctor has prescribed them for pain and not depression
- Amitriptyline is also dispensed under different brand names (Elavil®, Triptafen® and Triptafen-M®).

**Prescriptions - how to get your medicine**

In only exceptional cases will pain killers be prescribed directly in clinic by a pain specialist. The agreed shared care arrangement is that your GP prescribes drugs taking into account specialist recommendations.

To get your prescription you need to make an appointment with your GP ca 1-3 weeks after your pain clinic consultation or when you receive a copy of the clinic letter.

Also remember to see your GP in time for repeat prescriptions to avoid running out of drugs. If the drug doesn’t help or you struggle with side effects please do not wait for your next pain clinic review (this will often be several months later). The pain clinic letter usually lists several alternatives; to avoid delays you need to make a further appointment with your GP to discuss lack of effect or side effect and get a prescription for replacement drug or advice.

Take a proactive approach and request reviews - don’t wait until appointments are made for

Valuables should not be brought into the hospital. If patients have to bring in valuable items they should ask a nurse to store them safely and request a receipt for the items. You may not be able to have the valuable items returned if the time of discharge from hospital is out of hours.

We are sorry but the Trust cannot accept responsibility for loss or damage to items not given for safe keeping.

You can get further information on all sorts of health issues through NHS interactive available through Sky TV or online at: <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/>

For Health advice and out of hours GP service please call the NHS 111 service on: 111

**We Value Your Views On Our Service**

If you wish to comment on the care which you, your relative or friend has received, we will be pleased to hear from you. Please speak to the person in charge of the ward, clinic or service in the first instance or ask them to contact the Quality Team. If you wish to contact them directly, telephone on 534850.

Alternatively you may prefer to write to:

Chief Executive  
 Isle Of Wight NHS Trust  
 St Mary’s Hospital  
 Newport  
 Isle of Wight

PO30 5TG

You can also share any concerns you have about our services with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) on 03000 61 61 61 or at [enquires@cqc.org.uk](mailto:enquires@cqc.org.uk)

All NHS sites are no smoking areas.

If you would like help and advice to stop smoking please call: Freephone 0800 169 0 169 to talk to the NHS Smoking Helpline.

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