

# Venlafaxine

Medication Information Leaflet

## What is this medication for?

Venlafaxine belongs to a class of medications known as Serotonin and Noradrenaline Reuptake Inhibitors (SNRI). It is used to treat symptoms of depression (low mood) such as:

- Feeling sad
- Feeling hopeless or useless
- Feeling bad about yourself
- Thoughts of ending your life
- Poor sleep, energy or appetite.

It may also be used to treat symptoms of anxiety such as:

- Feeling uncontrollably or constantly worried
- Very fast heartbeat
- Uncontrolled shaking of body parts such as hands (tremors)
- Sweating
- Nervousness

Venlafaxine may be used for other conditions. Check with your healthcare professional if you are unsure why you are given this medication.

## How should I take/use this medication?

- Follow the instructions on your medication label and take the medication as prescribed by your doctor.
- Venlafaxine should be taken with food. Swallow the tablet or capsule whole, do NOT chew or crush it.
- This medication needs to be taken regularly for a few weeks before you feel its full benefits. You should not stop taking this medication even if you do not feel better at the beginning. Continue to take this medication even after you feel better to prevent your symptoms from returning.
- Do check with your doctor on how long you will have to be on this medication.
- Do not stop taking your medication without checking with your healthcare professional. You may experience unpleasant effects such as dizziness, headache, difficulty sleeping, irritability, and nausea if you suddenly stop taking the medication on your own.

## **What should I do if I forget to take/use this medication?**

If you forget to take a dose, take it as soon as you remember. However, if it is more than half of the time to the next dose, skip the missed dose and take the next dose at your usual timing. Do not take two doses to make up for the missed dose.

## What precautions should I take?

Inform your healthcare professional if:

- You are allergic to this medication or any of the other ingredients of this medication
- You are pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or breastfeeding. If you are pregnant and/or breastfeeding, your doctor would have discussed the potential benefits and side-effects with you and should you have further questions or concerns, do consult your doctor.
- You have or have ever had:
  - Other drug allergies
  - Heart, kidney or liver disease
  - Medical conditions such as high blood pressure, fits (seizures), increased eye pressure (glaucoma), low sodium in the blood (hyponatremia) or bleeding problems
  - Other mental health conditions such as bipolar disorder or abnormally high or excited mood (mania)
  - Been taking other medications for low mood in the past 2 weeks.

Venlafaxine may increase your blood pressure. It is important to maintain regular check-ups with your doctor.

### **IMPORTANT:**

In some cases, particularly in young people below the age of 25 years, this medication may cause the following changes to a person's mental condition, especially in the first few weeks of treatment or during dose changes:

- New or worsening thoughts of harming yourself or ending your life
- Worsening agitation, restlessness, violent behaviour, or
- Other changes in mood or behaviour

Please inform your doctor as soon as possible, or for your family or caregiver to inform your doctor if you are unable to seek treatment on your own.

Do not stop taking this medication on your own without discussing with your doctor.

It is important to note that your doctor has prescribed this medication as he/ she feels you will benefit more from taking this medication over the possible risks that it may cause, which have a low chance of occurring, and most people take this medication without any of such problems.

## What are some common side-effects of this medication?

The mentioned side effects generally affect up to 10% of patients.

- Nausea or vomiting
  - Take the medication with or after food.
  - Take small but frequent meals and avoid fatty or spicy food
- Difficulty sleeping
  - Discuss with your doctor and take the medication in the morning instead.
  - Avoid daytime naps, listen to relaxing music at bedtime.
  - Limit caffeine intake at least 8 hours before bedtime.
  - Avoid over eating and drinking just before bed
- Dry mouth
  - Chew sugar-free gum, suck on sugar-free hard candies or ice chips, sip water regularly
- Constipation
  - Drink more water (if you do not have any fluid restriction), eat more high- fibre foods, and exercise regularly
  - Consult your doctor or pharmacist if you need medication to relieve your condition.
- Dizziness
  - Get up slowly from a sitting or lying down position
- Mild nervousness
  - May occur at the start of treatment and improves over time
- Headache, loss of appetite, weight loss, increased blood pressure, increased sweating, decreased sexual drive or ability
  - Speak to your doctor if any of these affect your daily life

Most of the side effects listed here will improve with time. Speak with your doctor if they continue, get worse or are affecting your daily life.

## **What are some rare but serious side-effects that I need to seek medical advice immediately?**

The symptoms of a drug allergy include one or more of the following:

- Swollen face/eyes/lips/tongue
- Difficulty in breathing
- Itchy skin rashes over your whole body

Very rarely (affect less than 1% of patients) this medication may cause:

- Fits (seizures)
- Unexplained fever, confusion, severe weakness, uncontrolled movements or muscle spasms (signs and symptoms of Serotonin syndrome)
- Blurred vision
- Fast or uneven heartbeat, chest pain
- Unusual bruising or bleeding

If you experience any of these symptoms, you should stop your medication and see your healthcare professional immediately.

## **What food or medication should I avoid when I take this medication?**

Avoid drinking alcohol while taking this medication as it may make you feel very drowsy. If you intend to take any over the counter medication, supplements, herbal remedy or traditional Chinese medication, consult your doctor or healthcare professional first to confirm that it is safe to take with Venlafaxine.

## **How should I store this medication?**

Store in a cool and dry place, away from direct sunlight. Keep this medication away from children.

## How should I throw away this medication safely?

Pack this medication into a black trash bag and seal it tightly before throwing into the rubbish chute or bin.

### Disclaimers

If you take more than the recommended dose, please seek medical advice immediately. The information provided on this page does not replace information from your healthcare professional. Please consult your healthcare professional for more information.

*This article is jointly developed by members of the National Medication Information workgroup. The workgroup consists of cluster partners (National Healthcare Group, National University Health System and SingHealth), community pharmacies (Guardian, Unity and Watsons) and Pharmaceutical Society of Singapore. The content does not reflect drug availability and supply information in pharmacies and healthcare institutions. You are advised to check with the respective institutions for such information.*

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