

Lamotrigine

(pronounced lam - ot - ree - geen)

Why has lamotrigine been prescribed?

Lamotrigine is a mood stabiliser and anticonvulsant. These medications can be prescribed to treat mood disorders.

What are the benefits of taking lamotrigine?

Lamotrigine is effective in reducing the severity of the symptoms of bipolar depression. It also shortens the time to recovery and prevents depression returning.

Are there any precautions with lamotrigine?

Lamotrigine is suitable for most people. As with all medicines, however, there are precautions. Your prescriber will usually check that it is safe to prescribe lamotrigine, but let your prescriber know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care may be needed:

- a) if you have Parkinson's disease or suffer from liver or kidney trouble.
- b) if you are taking any other medication especially oral contraceptive tablets, medication for schizophrenia, anticonvulsants or antidepressants. Also, tell your prescriber if you buy any medicine 'over the counter' from a pharmacy or supermarket. Please also tell your prescriber if you take any alternative or complementary medicine such as Chinese herbal medicines. St John's Wort should not be taken by patients prescribed lamotrigine.
- c) if you are pregnant, breast feeding, or wish to become pregnant.
- d) If you have an intolerance to lactose as this is an ingredient of lamotrigine tablets (but is not in the dispersible tablets).

What is the usual dose of lamotrigine?

The starting dose is usually 25mg daily. The dose is then usually slowly increased. The usual dose of lamotrigine may be between 100mg and 200mg daily. It may take some time to get to the dose that is most suitable. In people already taking valproate, lower doses are used.

How should lamotrigine be taken?

Lamotrigine is usually taken once or twice daily. However, you and your prescriber may decide that it is better for you to take the medicine at another time.

What form does lamotrigine come in?

Lamotrigine is available as tablets and dispersible tablets. The tablets are available as 25mg, 50mg, 100mg and 200mg and the dispersible tablets as 2mg, 5mg, 25mg and 100mg.

What should be done if a dose is missed?

If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If you miss a whole day's dose – just carry on as normal with the next day's dose. If you miss more than a day's dose, speak to your prescriber.

What will happen when lamotrigine is first taken?

Lamotrigine, like many medicines, does not work straight away. For example, it may take several days or even weeks for some symptoms to improve. To begin with, some people find that lamotrigine may help them feel more calm and relaxed. Later, (usually after a few days or more) other symptoms should begin to improve. Many people do not experience any side effects. However some people may experience some side effects. We have listed potential side effects in the table below, whether or not they are likely to be short or long-term and what measures can be taken is also described. There are other possible side effects – we have listed only the most important ones. Ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if you are worried about anything else that you think might be a side effect. Further information on side effects is available in the official manufacturer's leaflet.

Reporting side effects

The 'Yellow Card' scheme encourages patients to report any side effects that they feel may be caused by their medication. Ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse for the forms if you wish to report any side effects. Alternatively, telephone 0800 100 3352 or go to www.mhra.gov.uk.

Is lamotrigine addictive?

Lamotrigine is not addictive, but if you stop taking the medicine suddenly, you may experience unpleasant physical feelings.

What about alcohol?

It is recommended that people taking lamotrigine should not drink alcohol. This is because both mood stabilisers and alcohol can cause drowsiness. If the two are taken together, severe drowsiness can result. This can lead to falls and accidents. As well as this, drinking alcohol may make mania, depression and anxiety worse. However, once people are used to taking medication, then *very small amounts* of alcohol may not be harmful. It pays to be very careful, because alcohol affects people in different ways, especially when they are taking medication. Never drink alcohol and drive. Discuss any concerns you have with your doctor, pharmacist or nurse.

Is it OK to stop taking lamotrigine when symptoms go away?

No. If you stop taking lamotrigine, your original symptoms are very likely to return. Most people need to remain on lamotrigine for quite a long time, sometimes years. You should always discuss with your prescriber any plans you have to reduce or stop any of your prescribed medicines.


Are there any alternatives to lamotrigine?

Yes, there are alternatives available. Although mood stabilisers have broadly similar therapeutic effects they differ in the side effects they produce. There are several mood stabilisers available so most people can find one which suits them. Psychological therapies can also help in bipolar disorder, usually in addition to medication.

Further Information

Lamotrigine can rarely cause serious skin reactions. If you experience any rashes or blistering of the skin contact your prescriber immediately.

Summary of side effects

| Side effect | Side effect |
|--|--|
| Headache - Common What can be done about it? This should wear off within a few days. Paracetamol can be taken but discuss with your prescriber if this persists. |  |
| (Other less common) side effects | How common is it and what can be done about it? |
| Drowsiness | Uncommon This usually occurs when lamotrigine is started. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists. It may be necessary to alter the dose or preparation of lamotrigine. |
| Nausea | Uncommon This usually occurs when lamotrigine is started. Taking the medication with food or after food may help. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists. |
| Diarrhoea – loose stools | Uncommon This should wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists. |
| Double or blurred vision | Rare This usually occurs when lamotrigine is started or the dose is increased. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists. It may be necessary to alter the dose or preparation of lamotrigine. |
| Ataxia (unsteadiness) | Rare This usually occurs when lamotrigine is started or the dose is increased. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists. It may be necessary to alter the dose or preparation of lamotrigine. |
| Tremor | Rare This usually occurs when lamotrigine is started or the dose is increased. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists. It may be necessary to alter the dose or preparation of lamotrigine. |
| Rash | Rare Contact your doctor, pharmacist or nurse for advice. |
| Blood dyscrasias (low white blood cells) | Rare Any sore throat or fever should be reported to your prescriber immediately. |
| Liver damage | Very rare Report any signs of bruising or bleeding to your prescriber. |

Very common = almost everyone affected

Common = many people affected

Uncommon = some people affected

Rare = few people affected

Very rare = very few or no one affected

Disclaimer

This leaflet is to help you understand more about your medication. This is not an official manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet (see <http://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/>). Remember, leaflets like this can only describe some of the effects of medication. You may also find other books or leaflets useful. If you have access to the internet you may find a lot of information there as well, but be careful, as internet based information is not always accurate. If in doubt consult your GP or a health care professional.

This leaflet has been supplied by:

Medicines Information, Pharmacy Department, Maudsley Hospital, London SE5 8AZ | Telephone: 020 3228 2317

Artwork by Oscar Millar
www.millarstratton.co.uk