

Nortriptyline

(pronounced nor - trip - ta - leen)

Why has nortriptyline been prescribed?

Nortriptyline is an antidepressant. These medications are prescribed to treat depression and anxiety.

What are the benefits of taking nortriptyline?

Antidepressants are effective in reducing the severity of the symptoms of depression. They also shorten the time to recovery and prevent depression returning.

Are there any precautions with nortriptyline?

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

- a) if you have epilepsy, diabetes, glaucoma, or suffer from heart trouble or severe liver problems
- b) if you are taking any other medication especially anticoagulants such as warfarin, medication for Parkinson's disease, medication for schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, medication for anxiety or insomnia, medication for high blood pressure or irregular heart beat, cimetidine, HIV medications, anticonvulsants, antidepressants or strong pain killers. 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 nortriptyline.
- 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 nortriptyline tablets.

What is the usual dose of nortriptyline?

The starting dose is usually 20mg to 40mg a day. The dose is then usually slowly increased. The usual dose of nortriptyline may be between 75mg and 150mg daily. It may take some time to get to the dose that is most suitable.

How should nortriptyline be taken?

Nortriptyline can be taken in divided doses or as a single daily dose. However, you and your prescriber may decide that it is better for you to take the medicine at another time.

What form does nortriptyline come in?

Nortriptyline is available only as tablets. The tablets are available as 10mg and 25mg.

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 dose. If you miss more than a day's dose, speak to your prescriber.

What will happen when nortriptyline is first taken?

Nortriptyline, 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 nortriptyline may help them feel more calm and relaxed. Later, (usually in two to three weeks) other symptoms should begin to improve. Some people do not experience any side effects, however most people 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 0808 100 3352 or go to www.mhra.gov.uk.

Is nortriptyline addictive?

Nortriptyline is not addictive, but if you stop taking the medicine suddenly, you may experience unpleasant physical feelings. Symptoms are fairly common and include nausea, insomnia, diarrhoea, excess salivation and anxiety. Reducing the dose of nortriptyline slowly may make these symptoms less severe.

What about alcohol?

It is recommended that people taking nortriptyline should not drink alcohol. This is because both antidepressants 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 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 nortriptyline when symptoms go away?

No. If you stop taking nortriptyline, your original symptoms are very likely to return. Most people need to remain on nortriptyline for at least six months after they have fully recovered. 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 nortriptyline?

Yes, there are alternatives available. Although antidepressants have broadly similar therapeutic effects they differ in the side effects they produce. There are more than 20 antidepressants available so most people can find one which suits them. Psychological therapies can also help in some types of depression, either as an alternative to medication or alongside it.

Summary of side effects

Side effect		Side effect	
Drowsiness – Common What can be done about it? This should wear off within a few days or weeks. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists. Taking the medication at night-time may help, but beware of drowsiness in the following morning.		Blurred vision - Common What can be done about it? This should wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists. It may be necessary to switch to another medication. Symptoms will go away when switched to another medication.	
Dry mouth – Common What can be done about it? This should wear off within a few days. Sugar-free boiled sweets, chewing gum or eating citrus fruits may help. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.		Constipation – Common What can be done about it? Eat lots of fibre – fruit and vegetables are good sources. Drink plenty of fluids. Your prescriber may prescribe a laxative.	
Postural hypotension - Common (low blood pressure) What can be done about it? Try not to stand up too quickly. If you feel dizzy do not drive. This dizziness is not dangerous and should wear off after a few days.			

(Other less common) side effects	How common is it and what can be done about it?
Sexual dysfunction – Reduced libido (desire) and lack of orgasm in males and females. Impotence in males	Uncommon Any changes should be reported to your prescriber. It may be necessary to switch to another medication. Symptoms should go away when switched to another medication.
Increased appetite and weight gain	Uncommon Try to eat healthily and take exercise.
Sweating	Uncommon Discuss this with your prescriber if it becomes troublesome.
Tachycardia (palpitations)	Uncommon Contact your prescriber if you experience palpitations.
Urinary retention (difficulty passing water)	Rare Contact your prescriber if you have any difficulty passing water.

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.

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