

Phenelzine

(pronounced fen – al – zeen)

Why has phenelzine been prescribed?

Phenelzine is an antidepressant known as a monoamine oxidase inhibitor or MAOI. These medications are prescribed to treat depression.

What are the benefits of taking phenelzine?

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 phenelzine?

Phenelzine is suitable for most people. As with all medicines, however, there are precautions. Your prescriber will usually check that it is safe to prescribe phenelzine, 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, phaeochromocytoma, porphyria or suffer from heart or liver trouble.
- b) if you are taking any other medication, especially for Parkinson's disease, schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, medication for high blood pressure, antidepressants, anticonvulsants, strong pain killers or drugs for migraine. 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 phenelzine.
- c) if you are pregnant, breast feeding, or wish to become pregnant.

What is the usual dose of phenelzine?

The starting dose is usually 15mg three times a day. This may sometimes be increased after a few days or weeks up to a maximum of 30mg three times a day. The usual dose of phenelzine is between 45mg and 90mg daily.

How should phenelzine be taken?

Phenelzine is usually taken three times a day. However, you and your prescriber may decide that it is better for you to take the medicine at another time.

What form does phenelzine come in?

Phenelzine is available only as tablets. The tablets are available as 15mg.

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

What will happen when phenelzine is first taken?

Phenelzine, 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 phenelzine may help them feel more alert and less slowed down. Later, (usually in two to three weeks) 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 phenelzine addictive?

Phenelzine is not addictive, but if you stop taking the medicine suddenly, you may experience unpleasant physical feelings. Symptoms include nausea, insomnia, anxiety and dizziness.

What about alcohol?

It is recommended that people taking phenelzine should not drink any alcohol.

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

No. If you stop taking phenelzine your original symptoms are very likely to return. Most people need to remain on phenelzine 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 phenelzine?

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.

Further information

A number of foods need to be avoided while taking phenelzine. This is because phenelzine reacts with these foods and causes very high blood pressure. Foods containing large amounts of tyramine should be avoided. These include cheese, yoghurt, liver, matured fish or meat including dry sausages such as pepperoni, (red wine), alcohol and non-alcoholic beer, foods made of yeast extract e.g. Marmite or Bovril, pickled fish and broad bean pods. For further details speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

Summary of side effects

Side effect	Side effect
<p>Dizziness – Common</p> <p>What can be done about it? This may wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.</p> 	<p>Postural hypotension - Common (low blood pressure)</p> <p>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.</p> 
<p>Insomnia or disturbed sleep – Common</p> <p>What can be done about it? This should wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.</p> 	<p>Drowsiness – Common</p> <p>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.</p> 
<p>Constipation – Common</p> <p>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.</p> 	
(Other less common) side effects	How common is it and what can be done about it?
Blurred vision	Uncommon This should wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.
Anxiety or restlessness – feeling worried and agitated	Uncommon This should wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.
Oedema (swelling of ankles)	Uncommon This may persist. Tell your prescriber as an alternative medicine may need to be prescribed.

Headache	Uncommon This should wear off within a few days. Paracetamol can be taken but discuss with your prescriber if this persists
Urinary retention (difficulty passing water)	Rare Contact your prescriber if you have any difficulty passing water.
Dry mouth	Rare 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.
Sexual dysfunction – Reduced libido (desire) and lack of orgasm in males and females. Impotence in males	Rare 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.

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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