

Nortriptyline

Pamelor / nortriptyline capsules

A tricyclic antidepressant also used for certain pain problems. Careful dosing and monitoring help manage its risks.

From Jeffrey Panko, PMHNP-BC's education collection ·

Draft for review · Clinical content has not been revalidated for this website.

Follow your prescribed schedule

Capsules: 10, 25, 50, 75 mg

U.S. depression treatment · Pain and headache uses are off-label · Overdose can be life-threatening

What it is used for

Treats depression in adults, often after other options. It may also help prevent depression from returning when continued.

Certain nerve-pain and headache-prevention uses are off-label. Benefit varies; a pain dose may not adequately treat depression.

How it works

Mainly changes norepinephrine signaling, which may affect mood and pain pathways. It is also an active product of amitriptyline.

Other actions can cause dry mouth, sleepiness or standing dizziness. Heart conduction can be affected, especially in overdose.

What to expect over time

EARLY DAYS

Dry mouth, dizziness or grogginess may come first. Report troublesome effects before the next planned increase.

OVER SEVERAL WEEKS

Mood benefit builds gradually. Track function and pain goals too; sleepiness alone does not show benefit.

AFTER DOSE CHANGES

Blood levels may help guide treatment. Follow the laboratory's timing instructions; do not guess the draw time.

Taking your medication

Take consistently, with or without food. Your schedule may be once daily or divided. Bedtime dosing is only as prescribed.

Follow gradual dose changes. Rise slowly and avoid driving or dangerous tasks until you know how alert and steady you feel.

Avoid alcohol and check all new medicines. Ask before changing dose timing, opening capsules or restarting after several missed days.

When to get help

Emergency care: fainting, chest pain, irregular heartbeat, seizures, severe breathing trouble, or fever with agitation/stiffness.

Call promptly for worsening mood, suicidal thoughts, severe restlessness or unusually high energy. Call 911 for immediate danger.

Get urgent care for inability to urinate, severe belly pain/constipation, or eye pain with vision changes. Do not wait for follow-up.

Early side effects

Dry mouth, constipation, drowsiness, standing dizziness, blurred vision or nausea can occur. Report persistent or worsening effects.

Other effects to discuss

Weight, sweating or sexual changes can occur. Report confusion, falls or emotional flatness; do not assume these are unavoidable.

What to keep track of

Track mood, weight, pulse, blood pressure, bowel/bladder function and falls. ECGs depend on age and cardiac risk. Blood-level checks are recommended above 100 mg/day and may help at other doses. A result in range does not guarantee safety or replace an overdose assessment.

Before you start

Discuss recent heart attack, rhythm problems, unexplained fainting or family sudden death before 45, bipolar symptoms, self-harm risk, seizures, glaucoma, retention, constipation, thyroid disease and liver/kidney problems. Share all medicines and allergies. Tell your team about surgery, pregnancy or breastfeeding.

Medicines & interactions

MAOIs / urgent treatments

Do not combine with an antidepressant MAOI; allow at least 14 days in either direction. Linezolid and IV methylene blue need specialist management.

Medicines that raise levels

Fluoxetine, paroxetine, bupropion and others can raise nortriptyline levels. Changes may need dose or test adjustments; fluoxetine effects last weeks.

Serotonin / heart-rhythm drugs

Other antidepressants, tramadol, triptans, lithium and St. John's wort can add risks. Heart-rhythm or QT-prolonging drugs need specific review.

Cold, sleep and allergy products

Check decongestants, diphenhydramine and cimetidine. They can affect heart rate, blood levels, constipation or confusion; ask before adding them.

Alcohol / other sedatives

Avoid alcohol. Sleep, anxiety, opioid and other sedating drugs can increase impairment. Review thyroid and blood-pressure medicines as well.

Everyday tips

Use reminders; tell every doctor, dentist and pharmacist what you take. Agree on a limited supply if overdose risk is a concern.

Try sugar-free gum, dental care, suitable fluids, fiber and movement for mild dry mouth or constipation. Ask about persistent symptoms.

Use sun protection; sensitivity can increase. Report rash, jaundice, unusual bruising, fever, new confusion or unsteadiness promptly.

Keep visits and requested tests. Mood changes can occur at any age; the boxed warning includes increased risk through age 24.

Your questions, answered

What if I miss a dose?

Take it when remembered unless the next dose is near; then skip it. Never double. Ask your pharmacist if timing is unclear.

Can I stop once I feel better?

Plan a gradual taper with your prescriber, often over weeks or longer. Sudden stopping can cause withdrawal and depression may return.

How should my level be checked?

Ask for exact timing before the test. Laboratories use different ranges and trough instructions; your symptoms matter alongside the number.

Pregnancy or breastfeeding?

Discuss your plan rather than stopping abruptly. Pregnancy data are limited. Milk exposure is usually low; monitor infant feeding and alertness.

Storage & safety

Keep locked away from children; never share. Suspected overdose: call U.S. Poison Help 1-800-222-1222 immediately, even without symptoms. Do not induce vomiting. Call 911 for collapse, seizure, breathing difficulty, inability to wake or imminent self-harm.

A final reminder

Not a substitute for your prescription or Medication Guide.

About this information

For general information only; not a substitute for individualized medical advice. This sheet does not cover every risk or interaction. Ask your prescriber or pharmacist before changing how you take this medication.

Sources

1. <https://dailymed.nlm.nih.gov/dailymed/drugInfo.cfm?setid=e17dc299-f52d-414d-ab6e-e809bd6f8acb>
 2. <https://medlineplus.gov/druginfo/meds/a682620.html>
 3. <https://www.mayocliniclabs.com/test-catalog/Overview/37119>
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Educational inclusion does not mean this medication or its indications are treated at this practice. Review the guide for your exact product with your prescriber or pharmacist.

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