



Clozapine

What is clozapine?

Clozapine (Clozaril, Clopine, Closyn) is one of the antipsychotic medications. It belongs to the atypical group of antipsychotics which means it is unlikely to cause shaking, muscle stiffness or abnormal movements that are sometimes associated with more traditional antipsychotic medications.

Clozapine is used to treat the symptoms of schizophrenia such as hallucinations, delusional ideas and disorganised thoughts. It is a medication that is only used in patients who have not responded well to other antipsychotic medications or have had problems taking other antipsychotics because of severe side effects.

For many people, clozapine can be a very effective treatment and can make a huge difference to their quality of life.

People who are prescribed clozapine must have weekly blood tests when they first start treatment. This is to ensure that they don't develop a rare but severe side-effect that causes problems with the white blood cells that are needed to fight infection. After you have been taking the medication regularly for about 18 weeks these blood tests will generally be done on a four (4) weekly basis.

Published: November 2009.

How should I take the medication?

Clozapine comes in a tablet form that you must take daily as prescribed by your doctor.

You should continue taking the medication, even if you are feeling well. Clozapine needs to be taken regularly to prevent your symptoms from occurring again. If you have concerns about continuing on your medication, you should discuss these with your doctor.

If you have forgotten to take your medication, you should take it as soon as possible (provided this is within a few hours of the usual time you would take your medication). Otherwise, you should wait until the next dose is due and only take the usual amount. Do not try to catch up by doubling the amount if you miss a dose.

If you have missed taking clozapine for more than two days, you must contact your doctor immediately – do not start taking your regular clozapine dose again without consulting your doctor

What if I am taking other medications?

You should tell your doctor about any other medications that you are taking, including natural remedies and medications you have purchased without a prescription.

You should always check with your doctor or pharmacist before commencing another medication or natural remedy as clozapine can affect the way that other medications work.



What else should I know?

Ensure that you tell your doctor or pharmacist as soon as possible if you are not feeling well while taking clozapine.

CLOZAPINE SHOULD NOT BE STOPPED SUDDENLY Stopping clozapine suddenly puts you at risk of a rebound psychosis that may be even worse than previous episodes of illness.

Clozapine can increase the effects of alcohol, i.e. you can become more intoxicated or sedated if using alcohol with clozapine.

Clozapine can make you feel drowsy or slow you down so you should not drive a car or operate machinery if you experience these effects.

Cigarette smoking can affect the levels of clozapine in your bloodstream so it is important

to let your doctor know about changes in your smoking habits.

In some people a rare and unusual type of allergic reaction affecting the heart can occur. This may cause flu like symptoms and is sometimes associated with shortness of breath. Blood tests are done early looking for chemicals from the heart which might suggest this is happening. An ultrasound looking at heart function is done before starting clozapine, at any time this reaction is seriously suspected, and at around 6 months after starting. This reaction is one of the reasons it is important to let your doctor know if you get sick in any way when you are taking clozapine.



What are some of the common side-effects I might experience?

Side Effect	Treatment
Sedation	Talk to your doctor about your prescribed dose. Taking most of your prescribed dose at night may help.
Weight gain	Monitor your food intake and try not to have snacks between meals. Maintain a healthy diet and avoid foods that have a high fat content or lots of sugars. Establish a regular exercise regime.

High temperature	This can occur in the early stages of treatment. It is important to let your doctor know if you get a sore throat, mouth ulcers or “flu-like” symptoms.
A fast heartbeat at rest	This can occur at the start of treatment and usually goes away. If it persists, you feel breathless, or experience chest pain then contact your doctor.
Dizziness	Sit up slowly from a lying position, dangle your legs over the edge of the bed for a few minutes before standing up. If dizziness persists or if you feel faint then contact your doctor.
Loss of bladder control while sleeping	Speak with your doctor. Adjusting the amount of medication you take at night or limiting your fluid intake before bed can be helpful.
Increased production of saliva	Speak with your doctor about medications that can help reduce this problem.
Constipation	Increase the amount of fibre in your diet (wholegrain foods, fruits and vegetables). Drink plenty of fluids and exercise regularly. Talk to your doctor about other strategies if this remains a problem.

Nausea	Can occur in the first few weeks of treatment. Speak with your doctor about other medications that may help you to feel less nauseous.
--------	--

(adapted from Prof D. Castle and N Tran: Psychiatric Medication Information, St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne February 2008)



This brochure contains general information and does not include all possible side effects or all brand names of medications.

SYDNEY SOUTH WEST
AREA HEALTH SERVICE
NSW HEALTH
Mental Health Services