

Lamotrigine (say: lam-ot-ree-jean)

What is lamotrigine used for?

- Lamotrigine (also called Lamictal®) is mainly used to help treat the symptoms of epilepsy
- It can also sometimes be used to help stop the symptoms of bipolar depression returning
- It is made as tablets and dispersible tablets.

What is the usual dose of lamotrigine?

- You should start at 25mg a day for two weeks, then increase to 50mg a day for two weeks. The slower you start lamotrigine, the lower the chance of getting the skin problem
- The dose can then be increased every week or two after that
- This start needs to be even slower if you are also taking valproate
- The usual final dose of lamotrigine is around 50-200mg a day.

How should I take lamotrigine?

- Swallow the tablets with at least half a glass of water whilst sitting or standing
- This is to make sure that they reach the stomach and do not stick in your throat
- The dispersible tablets can be chewed or dispersed in water and then swallowed.

When should I take lamotrigine?

- Take your lamotrigine at regular times each day
- If you take it once a day this is usually best at bedtime as it may make you sleepy at first
- It can be taken with or after food
- If you are taking more than 100mg a day this should usually be taken twice a day.

What are the alternatives to lamotrigine?

- There are many other anticonvulsants and treatments for epilepsy, and some other medicines (e.g. quetiapine), talking therapies and treatments for bipolar depression.

- ☞ See our "Handy chart" for e.g. bipolar depression to help you compare the medicines available
- ☞ This will help you discuss your care with your doctor, case manager or pharmacist.

How long will lamotrigine take to work?

- This will depend on what you are taking it for
- It may take up to a month or two to start to work
- The effect builds over the next few months.

How long will I need to keep taking it for?

- This will depend on what you are taking it for. If it works you may want to take it for several years.

Is lamotrigine addictive and can I stop taking it suddenly?

- Lamotrigine is not addictive but it is unwise to stop taking it suddenly, even if you feel better
- Your symptoms can return if stopped too early
- This may occur some weeks or even months after lamotrigine has been stopped
- When the time comes, you should withdraw lamotrigine by a gradual reduction in the dose over several weeks
- You should discuss this fully with your doctor, case manager or pharmacist.

See our handy fact sheet on 'Coming off medicines'

What should I do if I forget to take a dose of lamotrigine at the right time?

- Take the missed dose as soon as you remember unless it is within about 4-6 hours of your next dose
- If you remember after this time, just take the next dose as normal
- Do not try to catch up by taking two doses at once as you may get more side-effects
- If you stop taking lamotrigine for 7 days or more (or 2 weeks if you're also taking valproate as well) you will need to start again slowly at 25mg a day for 2 weeks, 50mg a day for 2 weeks then increasing by 50-100mg a day every 1-2 weeks
- If you don't start it again slowly you risk getting the nasty skin rashes.

If you have problems remembering your doses (many people do) ask your pharmacist, doctor or case manager about this. Webster, other packs and Apps can help you.

Can I drink alcohol while I am taking it?

- Lamotrigine can increase the effects of alcohol, make you sleepy, reduce your concentration and slow your reactions
- This is important if you need to drive or operate machines and you must seek advice on this.

Will lamotrigine affect my other medication?

Lamotrigine has a few possible interactions with other medicines. The main ones include:

- The effects of lamotrigine can sometimes be increased by valproate (Valpro® and Valprease®)
- The effect of lamotrigine can be decreased by carbamazepine (Tegretol®), lopinavir/ritanovir (Kaletra®) or phenytoin
- Lamotrigine can decrease the effect of oral contraceptives. If you are on lamotrigine and then



start taking "the Pill", your lamotrigine dose will probably need to be increased, possibly even doubled. If you are taking lamotrigine and then stop taking "The Contraceptive Pill", your lamotrigine dose may need to be reduced. This should be during the first week after you stop.

You must see the Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflet for the full list of interactions. Some of these medicines can still be used together but you must follow your doctor's instructions carefully.

Will I need any blood or other tests if I am taking lamotrigine?

- You may need blood tests while you are taking lamotrigine to check on your blood.

Can I drive, cycle or operate a boat while I am taking lamotrigine?

- You may feel a bit sleepy at first when taking it
- You should be careful as it may slow down your reaction times
- Until this wears off, or you know how lamotrigine affects you, do not drive or operate machines.

What about pregnancy and lamotrigine?

- You must get **expert help** if you want to be, or find you are, pregnant while taking lamotrigine
- Your dose may need to be changed
- See our two fact sheets (a general one plus one just for lamotrigine).

What sort of side-effects might I get if I am taking lamotrigine?

This table shows some of the most common side effects and any you might need to take action on. You **must** also see the Consumer Information Leaflet (CMI) for the full list of possible side effects but do not be worried by this. Some people get no side effects at all. Others may get some that are not listed. Some side effects are the brain getting used to a medicine and these usually wear off in a few days or weeks. Starting slower may help. If you think you might have a side effect to this medicine, you should ask your doctor, pharmacist or case manager.

Side effect	What happens	What to do about it
VERY COMMON (<i>more than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Sleepiness	You feel sleepy or sluggish. It can last for a few hours after taking your dose, or longer.	Don't drive or use machines. Discuss with your doctor if you can take the drug at a different time of the day. Some people, however, find it makes it harder to get to sleep.
Dizziness	Feeling light-headed and faint.	Don't stand up too quickly. Try and lie or sit down if you feel it coming on. Don't drive.
Headache	Your head is pounding and painful.	Try paracetamol. Your pharmacist will be able to advise if this is safe to take with any other medicines you may be taking.
Nausea	Feeling sick.	If it is bad, contact your doctor.
COMMON (<i>fewer than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Blurred vision	Things look fuzzy and you can't focus your eyes properly.	Don't drive. See your doctor if you are worried.
RARE but important (<i>can be serious if not dealt with quickly</i>)		
Skin rashes	Red rashes across the face and body, blisters and inflammation in the nose, mouth and eyes. It may look a bit like serious burning or sunburn.	Stop taking and contact your doctor straight away. This can be dangerous as it might be the start of the rare Stevens-Johnson syndrome or Toxic Epidermal Necrolysis (TEN). The chances of getting it are very low the slower you start (see first page). Ask to see our Handy Fact Sheet on the rash and how to avoid it.
Bone marrow suppression	Unexpected bruising, infections, and anaemia	Stop taking and contact your doctor straight away.
Seizures	Having a fit or convulsion, or a worsening of your symptoms.	Stop taking and contact your doctor straight away.
Suicidal ideation	Thoughts of harming yourself	This is rare. See your doctor in the next day if this happens.

Lifeline provides 24hr telephone crisis support on 13 11 14 or visit www.lifeline.org.au for information & downloads

The small print: This leaflet is to help you understand more about lamotrigine. You **must** also read the manufacturer's Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) Leaflet. You may find more on the internet but beware as internet-based information is not always accurate. Do not share medicines with anyone else.

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