

Clozapine (pronounced cloz-a-peen)

Other names: Clopine®, Clozaril®



Important note: The following information is intended to add to, not replace, the knowledge and judgment of your doctor, pharmacist or other health care professional.

Why you are taking clozapine?

Clozapine is mainly used to treat the symptoms of schizophrenia. It is often effective where other antipsychotics have not helped. Some people have trouble with their thinking and feel that other people can read their thoughts. These are called 'positive symptoms'. Many people with schizophrenia also experience 'negative symptoms'. They feel tired, lack energy and may become quite inactive and withdrawn. Clozapine may help relieve both positive and negative symptoms, even when other antipsychotics have not.

Why do I need to have blood tests?

Before you start clozapine, your doctor will register you with an approved monitoring company. It is a requirement that you have regular blood tests. This is because, rarely, clozapine can lower the number of white cells in your blood. White cells fight infection. If you do not have enough white blood cells it will be harder for your body to fight off infection.

To make it safe for you when you first start taking clozapine, your blood will be tested every week. After 18 weeks, you will need a blood test every 4 weeks. You may need extra blood tests if you are unwell or if your blood test has changed.

When to take clozapine

The usual dose of clozapine is around 300-600mg a day up to a maximum of 900mg a day.

Clozapine may take several weeks to start working. To begin with, most people find that this medicine will help them feel more relaxed and calm. After two or three weeks other symptoms should begin to improve. You may carry on getting better for many months. You might get some side effects before you start to feel better. Most of these should go away after a few weeks. See the 'Side Effects' table.

Take your clozapine as directed on the medicine label. If you have any questions, speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

If you miss a dose

Take as soon as possible (within a few hours) except when it is close to the time for your next dose. If it is almost time for the next dose, skip the missed dose and return to your regular dosing schedule. **Do not try to catch up by taking two doses at once as you may get more side-effects.**

When I feel better, can I stop taking clozapine?

No. If you stop taking clozapine, your original symptoms may return. You should decide with your doctor when you can come off it. Most people need to be on clozapine for a long time. Unless it is urgent, you should come off clozapine gradually over several weeks or months.

Can I drink alcohol while I am taking clozapine? What about marijuana?

Alcohol or marijuana taken with clozapine can make you sleepy. They can also reduce the effect of clozapine and add to side effects of poor co-ordination which may lead to falls and accidents.

As well as this, drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana may make your psychosis worse or your mood unstable.

It is recommended that you do not drink alcohol or use marijuana or any other illicit drugs while on clozapine. However, once your body is used to clozapine you can sometimes drink small amounts of alcohol without any harm. Never drive after drinking alcohol or using other drugs.

Will clozapine affect my other medicines?

Clozapine interacts with some other medicines. Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking any other medicine including herbal or complementary products and medicines you can buy without a prescription.

Smoking and clozapine

If you stop **smoking** while on clozapine, then the levels of clozapine can increase which could make you really unwell. You must let your doctor or nurse know if you are planning on giving up smoking, reducing smoking or have stopped.

What sort of side-effects might occur while taking clozapine?

SIDE EFFECTS	WHAT IS IT	WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT
COMMON		
Blurred vision	Things look fuzzy and you can't focus properly.	See your doctor if you are worried or it does not go away.
Constipation	When you want to poo but can't; the opposite of diarrhoea. In other words, you can not pass a bowel motion.	Eat more fruit and vegetables. Do more walking. Drink plenty of fluid, especially water. If this does not help ask your doctor or pharmacist for a laxative.
Sleepiness / drowsiness	Feeling sleepy or sluggish for a few hours after a dose.	Don't drive or use machinery. Ask your doctor if you can take your clozapine at a different time of day.
Hypersalivation	You dribble and your mouth gets full of saliva or spit. Your pillow is wet in the morning.	Your doctor may be able to give you a medicine to help this. Propping up pillows at night may help a bit.
Urinary incontinence	Passing urine involuntarily / wetting the bed.	Mention this to your doctor. There are medicines that can help with this.
Low blood pressure	This can make you feel dizzy.	Try not to stand up too quickly. If you feel dizzy, don't drive.
A fast heart beat - tachycardia	It may feel like palpitations.	Talk to your doctor about this.

SIDE EFFECTS	WHAT IS IT	WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT
Weight gain	Eating more and putting on weight.	A diet full of vegetables and fibre may help prevent weight gain.
RARE BUT IMPORTANT		
Agranulocytosis or neutropenia	Low numbers of white cells in the blood. You may get more infections.	This will be picked up from your blood tests. Contact your doctor immediately if you get an unexpected fever, sore throat or illness.
Fever or flu-like symptoms	A high temperature. Feeling unwell	See your doctor as soon as possible. You may need another blood test.
Seizures	Having a fit or convulsion.	Stop taking clozapine and contact your doctor immediately.

Important points:

- **If you have a sore throat, fever or feel unwell in any way - contact your doctor immediately**
- **If you have difficulty passing bowel motions – contact your doctor as soon as possible**

Pregnancy

Talk to your doctor straight away if you become pregnant while taking clozapine, or if you plan on becoming pregnant.

Storage

Keep all medicines out of reach of children.

Read this leaflet and discuss any questions you have about your medicines with your doctor or pharmacist.