

# M.A.O.I. ANTIDEPRESSANTS

## **Why have I been prescribed an MAOI?**

MAOIs (MonoAmine Oxidase Inhibitors) are a group of medicines called antidepressants which are used to treat depression. Depression is a common condition. It is different from the normal "ups and downs" of everyday life. People with depression may feel sad most of the time and cannot see an end to their sadness. Tiredness and poor sleep are very common, as are changes in appetite. Many people also find that they simply cannot enjoy any of life's pleasures.

Depression can be treated in many ways. Certain "talking" therapies are also effective for some people. Antidepressants can generally be relied upon to relieve the symptoms of depression in most people.

## **What exactly are MAOIs?**

MAOIs are antidepressants. They are not tranquillisers or sleeping tablets. They have been in use for about thirty years. They are useful in resistant depression when other medicines have failed. They are also good for 'atypical' depression. The MAOI group of drugs includes isocarboxazid ('*Marplan*'), phenelzine ('*Nardil*') and tranylcypromine ('*Parnate*').

## **Are the MAOIs safe to take?**

It is usually safe to have MAOIs regularly as prescribed by your doctor, but they don't suit everyone. Let your doctor know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care may be needed:

- a) if you have diabetes, epilepsy, hyperthyroidism, porphyria, phaeochromocytoma, or suffer from heart or liver trouble;
- b) if you are taking any other medication. This includes medicines bought from your pharmacist without a prescription. See the question on "medicines to avoid" below;
- c) if you are pregnant, breast feeding, or wish to become pregnant.

## **How should I take my MAOI?**

Look at the label on your medicine; it should have all the necessary instructions on it. Follow this advice carefully. If you have any questions, speak to your doctor or pharmacist. Most medicines are now dispensed with an information leaflet for you to read.

## **What should I do if I miss a dose?**

Never change your dose without checking with your doctor. If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember, as long as it is within a few hours of the usual time.

## **Are there any foods or drinks that I should avoid?**

A chemical called tyramine is present in some foods. Examples include cheese, pâté, pickled herrings, yeast extracts (e.g. Oxo, Marmite, Bovril, Twiglets), broad bean pods, Chianti wine and home-brewed beer. MAOIs can react with the tyramine in these foods, causing your blood pressure to rise. This is called a hypertensive crisis. You may feel hot and flushed or have a headache. This can be dangerous. If this happens, seek urgent medical advice e.g. a casualty department. Make a note of any foods or drinks that give you this reaction. Tell your doctor when you next meet. Your pharmacist can give you a card, which lists all the foods and drinks to be avoided.

## **Are there any medicines that I should avoid or take care with?**

Ask your pharmacist or doctor before you buy anything, particularly if it is for a cough, cold, the 'flu, hay fever or catarrh. Do not take St. John's wort. MAOIs can react with these medicines to cause problems. Ask for advice if you are taking strong pain-killers. Always ask your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure about any medicine. Your MAOI card also has a list of medicines to be avoided.

## **When I feel better, can I stop taking them?**

No. If you stop taking your MAOI, your original symptoms may return. To reduce your chances of becoming depressed again, you may need to take your antidepressant for at least 6 months after you feel better, and sometimes longer. This is not thought to be harmful. You and your doctor should decide when you can come off it.

## **What will happen to me when I start taking my MAOI?**

All antidepressants work slowly. People tend to feel better over a period of weeks rather than days. Different symptoms may get better at different times. Most people find that they feel noticeably better after about two or three weeks. However, the full effect of antidepressants is usually felt only after about four to six weeks. It is very important to continue to take antidepressants so that the full effects can be felt. Speak to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if you have any questions about this.

Unfortunately, you might get some side effects. Many of these can be quite mild and should go away after a week or so. Look at the table over the page. It tells you what to do if you get any side effects. Not everyone will get the side effects shown. There are many other possible side effects. Ask your pharmacist, doctor or nurse if you are worried about anything else that you think might be a side effect.

Side effect	What is it?	What should I do if it happens to me?
<b>COMMON</b>		
POSTURAL HYPOTENSION	A low blood pressure. You may feel faint when you stand up.	Try not to stand up too quickly. If you feel dizzy, don't drive. This dizziness is not dangerous
<b>UNCOMMON</b>		
CONSTIPATION	Feeling "bunged up" inside. You can't pass a motion or stool.	Eat more fibre e.g. bran, fruit and vegetables. Do more walking. Make sure you drink plenty of fluid. A mild laxative from a pharmacy might help.
DROWSINESS	Feeling sleepy or sluggish in the daytime.	Don't drive or use machinery.
DRY MOUTH	Not much saliva or spit.	Sugar-free boiled sweets, chewing gum or eating citrus fruits usually helps. If not, your doctor can give you a mouth spray. A change in medicine or dose may be possible.
FATIGUE	You feel tired all the time. This may happen early on in treatment and should go away.	Tell your doctor. It may be possible to adjust your dose slightly.
HEADACHE	When your head is pounding and painful.	It should be safe to take aspirin or paracetamol. If it lasts a long time, see your doctor.
INSOMNIA	Not being able to get to sleep or stay asleep.	Common with tranlycypromine. Take your last dose before 3 pm.
<b>RARE</b>		
BLURRED VISION	Things look fuzzy.	Don't drive. Contact your doctor.
OEDEMA	Swelling on the legs.	It is not dangerous. See your doctor.
SKIN RASHES	Blotches seen anywhere.	Stop taking – see your doctor now.
SWEATING	Feeling hot and sticky. Your clothes may get wet.	Contact your doctor. You will need to have your blood pressure checked.
URINE RETENTION	Not much urine passed.	Contact your doctor now.

#### **What about alcohol?**

Officially you should not drink while taking MAOIs. This is because MAOIs can react with alcohol and cause a rise in blood pressure, which can be very dangerous. It is best to avoid Chianti, home made beers and wines, real ales and red wines. Be careful with white wines and non-alcoholic beers and lagers. The safest would appear to be gin, vodka and other clear spirits. Avoid alcohol altogether for the first one or two months. After this, if you want a drink, try a glass of a drink that is safer for you and see how you feel. It pays to be very cautious because alcohol affects people in different ways, especially when they are taking medication. If your MAOI and alcohol react badly, you may feel hot and flushed. You may also get a headache. This can be dangerous. If this happens, seek urgent medical advice e.g. a casualty department.

Don't stop taking your medication because you fancy a drink at the weekend. If you do drink alcohol, drink only small amounts. Never drink any alcohol and drive while on MAOIs. Discuss any concerns you may have with your doctor or pharmacist. Also, drinking alcohol often makes depression worse. Excessive drinking is especially likely to do this.

#### **Are MAOIs addictive?**

MAOIs are not addictive, although some people do get some "discontinuation" effects if they stop their MAOI suddenly. These effects include anxiety, dizziness, feeling sick and not being able to sleep. Some people feel confused and "out of sorts". These symptoms are less severe if you come off your MAOI slowly. It is best to discuss this with your doctor or pharmacist.

Remember, leaflets like this can only describe some of the effects of medication. You may find other books or leaflets also 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.



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