

MIRTAZAPINE ('Zispin')

Mur – taz – a – peen

Why have I been prescribed mirtazapine?

Mirtazapine is used to treat depression. It is an antidepressant. 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, and so are changes in appetite. Many people also find that they simply cannot enjoy any of life's pleasures.

Depression is 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 is mirtazapine?

Mirtazapine is an antidepressant. It is not a tranquilliser or sleeping tablet. It is a relatively new kind of antidepressant. The brand or trade name for mirtazapine is 'Zispin'.

Is mirtazapine safe to take?

It is usually safe to have mirtazapine regularly as prescribed by your doctor, but it doesn'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 epilepsy, diabetes, or glaucoma, or suffer from heart, liver, kidney, or prostate trouble;
- b) if you are taking any other medication. This includes medicine bought from your pharmacist without a prescription, such as St. John's wort.
- c) if you are pregnant, breast feeding, or wish to become pregnant.

What is the usual dose of mirtazapine?

The starting dose of mirtazapine is usually 15mg or 30mg a day. The usual dose is 30mg a day. The maximum dose of mirtazapine is 45mg a day.

How should I take mirtazapine?

Mirtazapine is best taken at night, especially at first, when you may feel a little drowsy. 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.

Is mirtazapine addictive?

Mirtazapine is not addictive, although some people do get some "discontinuation" effects if they stop some other antidepressants suddenly. These effects can include anxiety, dizziness, feeling sick and not being able to sleep. Some people feel confused and "out of sorts". These symptoms are very rare indeed with mirtazapine. It is best to discuss this with your pharmacist, doctor or nurse.

What will happen to me when I start taking mirtazapine?

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 or pharmacist if you have any questions about this.

Unfortunately, you might get some side effects before you start to feel any better. Most side effects should go away after a few weeks. 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?
COMMON		
DROWSINESS	Feeling sleepy or sluggish. It can last for a few hours after taking your dose	Don't drive or use machinery. This may wear off with time. If it is still a problem after a few weeks, see your doctor.
INCREASED APPETITE	Eating more and putting on weight, especially just after you start taking mirtazapine	Avoid fatty foods like chocolate, crisps and fizzy drinks. A diet full of vegetables and fibre will usually help, as will physical activities such as walking. If it becomes a problem or you are worried, ask to see a dietician.
UNCOMMON		
ALTERED LIVER FUNCTION	Your liver is not working as normal. You should not feel any symptoms. This is only discovered if your doctor does a blood test.	Your doctor will probably want to do regular blood tests to make sure your liver is OK.
RARE		
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.
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
TREMOR	Feeling shaky	Contact your doctor now.
VERY RARE		
BLOOD DYSCRASIAS	Loss of white blood cells, and may show as fever or sore throat.	Contact your doctor now.
SEXUAL DYSFUNCTION	Lack of libido or no interest in sex. Inability to maintain an erection	Mention it to your doctor on your next visit.

What about alcohol?

It is officially recommended that people taking mirtazapine should not drink alcohol. This is because both mirtazapine and alcohol can cause drowsiness. If the two are taken at the same time, severe drowsiness can result. This can lead to falls or accidents. As well as this, drinking alcohol often makes depression worse. Excessive drinking is especially likely to do this. Once people are used to taking mirtazapine, they can sometimes drink alcohol in small amounts without any harm. **Avoid alcohol** altogether for the first one or two months. After this, if you want a drink, try a glass of your normal drink and see how you feel. If this doesn't make you feel drowsy, then it is probably OK to drink small amounts. It pays to be very cautious because alcohol affects people in different ways, especially when they are taking medication.

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 mirtazapine. Discuss any concerns you may have with your doctor or pharmacist.

When I feel better, can I stop taking mirtazapine?

No. If you stop taking mirtazapine, 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 should decide with your doctor when you can come off it.

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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