

# QUETIAPINE ('Seroquel')

## *Quet - ia - peen*

### ***Why have I been prescribed quetiapine?***

Quetiapine is used to help treat schizophrenia, psychosis and similar conditions.

When they have schizophrenia, many people hear voices talking to them or about them. They may also become suspicious or paranoid. Some people also have problems with their thinking and feel that other people can read their thoughts. These are called "positive symptoms". Quetiapine can help to relieve these symptoms. Many people with schizophrenia also experience "negative symptoms". They feel tired and lacking in energy and may become quite inactive and withdrawn. Quetiapine may help relieve these symptoms as well.

Quetiapine may also be prescribed for people who have had bad side effects with older types of medicines, such as strange movements and shaking. Quetiapine does not usually cause these effects. Older drugs may also increase levels of the hormone prolactin. This can cause a loss of sexual drive and impotence and affect women's periods. Quetiapine does not cause these effects.

### ***What exactly is quetiapine?***

Quetiapine is one of a group of medicines used to treat schizophrenia and similar disorders. These illnesses are sometimes referred to as psychoses, hence the name given to this group of medicines which is the "antipsychotics". They are sometimes also called the neuroleptics or (incorrectly) major tranquillisers.

Quetiapine is a newer type of antipsychotic. It probably works in a different way and has different side effects to the older drugs. Quetiapine has been available since 1997. It may help people who have negative symptoms and have not got much better on the older antipsychotics. Quetiapine may also be better for people who have had bad side effects from the older drugs. The trade or brand name for quetiapine is 'Seroquel'.

### ***Is quetiapine safe to take?***

It is usually safe to have quetiapine 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 suffer from heart, kidney or liver trouble;
- b) if you are taking any other medication;
- c) if you are pregnant, breast feeding, or wish to become pregnant.

### ***What is the usual dose of quetiapine?***

The usual starting dose is 50mg a day. This is usually increased over a few days to between 300 to 450mg a day. Some people may need higher doses. The usual maximum dose is 750mg a day. Quetiapine is usually taken twice a day. You may be given a starter pack with all the necessary doses in it when you start treatment.

### ***How should I take quetiapine?***

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.

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

Antipsychotics do not work straight away. For example, it may take several days or even weeks for some of the symptoms to reduce. To begin with, most people find that this medication will help them feel more relaxed and calm. Later, after one or two weeks, other symptoms should begin to improve.

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 of the usual 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>		
DYSPEPSIA	Stomach pain or upset	Try taking the tablets with or after food.
DROWSINESS	Feeling sleepy or sluggish. It can last for a few hours after taking your dose	Don't drive or use machinery. Ask your doctor if you can take your quetiapine at different times of the day.
<b>UNCOMMON</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
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.
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.
TACHYCARDIA	This is a fast heart beat. It may feel like palpitations	It is not usually dangerous. It can be easily treated if it lasts a long time.
WEIGHT GAIN	Eating more and putting on weight, especially just after you start taking quetiapine	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.

### What about alcohol?

It is officially recommended that people taking quetiapine should not drink alcohol. This is because both quetiapine and alcohol can cause drowsiness. If the two are taken at the same time, severe drowsiness can occur. This can lead to falls or accidents. As well as this, drinking alcohol often makes psychosis worse. Excessive drinking is especially likely to do this. Once people are used to taking medication, 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. Discuss any concerns you may have with your doctor, pharmacist or nurse. If you do drink alcohol, drink only small amounts. Never drink any alcohol and drive.

### When I feel better, can I stop taking quetiapine?

No. If you stop taking quetiapine, your original symptoms may return, but this may not be for 3 to 6 months after you stop the drug. You and your doctor should decide together when you can come off it. Most people need to be on quetiapine for quite a long time, sometimes years. This is not thought to be harmful. Quetiapine is not addictive.

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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