

# TRICYCLIC ANTIDEPRESSANTS

## *Try – sigh – click*

### **Why have I been prescribed a tricyclic?**

Tricyclics are a group of medicines 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, and so 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. Antidepressants are often used because they are effective for most people. Other “talking” therapies are also effective in depression. Antidepressants can generally be relied upon to relieve the symptoms of depression in most people. The tricyclics can also be helpful in treating other conditions, such as anxiety, sleep problems, panic, obsessive-compulsive disorder and social phobia.

### **What exactly are tricyclics?**

The tricyclics are antidepressants. They are not tranquillisers or sleeping tablets. The tricyclics have been used for many years to treat depression. Some examples of tricyclic antidepressants are amitriptyline (*‘Tryptizol’*), amoxapine (*‘Asendis’*), clomipramine (*‘Anafranil’*), dothiepin or dosulepin (*‘Prothiaden’*), doxepin (*‘Sinequan’*), imipramine (*‘Tofranil’*), lofepramine (*‘Gamanil’*), nortriptyline (*‘Allegron’*) and trimipramine (*‘Surmontil’*). There are some others.

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

It is usually safe to have tricyclics 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 epilepsy, diabetes, phaeochromocytoma or glaucoma, or suffer from heart, liver, thyroid, kidney, or prostate trouble;
- b) if you are taking any other medication. This includes medicine from your pharmacist, such as antihistamines, St. John’s wort or cimetidine (*‘Tagamet’*);
- c) if you are pregnant, breast feeding, or wish to become pregnant.

### **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.

### **How should I take a tricyclic?**

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 pharmacist, doctor or nurse. Most medicines are now dispensed with an information leaflet for you to read. They are often best taken at night, as the drowsiness may help you sleep.

### **Are tricyclics addictive?**

Tricyclics are not addictive, but need to be treated with respect. Some people do get some “discontinuation” effects if they stop their tricyclic 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 tricyclics slowly. It is best to discuss this with your doctor.

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

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 pharmacist, doctor or nurse if you have any questions about this.

Unfortunately, you might get some side effects before your mood gets any better. Most of these side effects 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>		
ANTI-CHOLINERGIC EFFECTS	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.
	Blurred vision	Things look fuzzy and you can't focus properly. See your doctor if you are worried. You won't need glasses.
	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.
	Difficulty in passing urine	Contact your doctor now.
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 tricyclic at a different time.
WEIGHT GAIN	A bigger appetite and putting on weight.	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.
<b>UNCOMMON</b>		
HEADACHE	When your head is pounding and painful.	It should be safe to take aspirin or paracetamol.
NAUSEA	Feeling sick.	Taking each dose with or after food may help. If it is bad, contact your doctor.
PALPITATIONS	A fast heart beat.	It is not usually dangerous. It can easily be treated if it lasts a long time. Tell your doctor about it.
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
SEXUAL DYSFUNCTION	Lack of libido or no interest in sex. Inability to maintain an erection or have an orgasm.	Discuss this with your doctor when you next meet.
SWEATING	Sweating more than normal, especially at night.	If it is bad, see your doctor.
<b>RARE</b>		
TREMOR	Feeling shaky.	Contact your doctor now.

### What about alcohol?

It is officially recommended that people taking tricyclics should not drink alcohol. This is because both tricyclics 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 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 at the weekend. If you do drink alcohol, drink only small amounts. Never drink any alcohol and drive while on tricyclics. Discuss any concerns you may have with your doctor or pharmacist.

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

No. If you stop taking tricyclics, 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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