

VENLAFAXINE ('Efexor')

Ven – la – fax – een

Why have I been prescribed venlafaxine?

Venlafaxine is 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. Other "talking" therapies are also effective in depression. Antidepressants can generally be relied upon to relieve the symptoms of depression in most people. Venlafaxine can also be useful in helping to manage other conditions, such as anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

What exactly is venlafaxine?

Venlafaxine is an antidepressant. It is not a tranquilliser or sleeping tablet. It is a relatively new kind of antidepressant and has been in widespread use for a few years. The trade or brand name of venlafaxine is 'Efexor'. 'Efexor XL' is still venlafaxine. The difference is that they are capsules instead of tablets and are "slow release". This means they can be taken once a day instead of twice a day, and you may get fewer side effects.

Is venlafaxine safe to take?

It is usually safe to have venlafaxine 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 or glaucoma, or suffer from heart, liver or kidney 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 is the usual dose of venlafaxine?

The starting dose of venlafaxine is 75mg a day. The usual dose is between 75mg and 150mg a day. The maximum dose of venlafaxine is 375mg a day. If you are taking the slow release capsules (Efexor XL), the maximum dose is 225mg a day.

How should I take my venlafaxine?

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.

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.

When I feel better, can I stop taking venlafaxine?

No. If you stop taking venlafaxine, 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.

Is venlafaxine addictive?

Venlafaxine is not addictive, but needs to be treated with respect. Some people do get some "discontinuation" effects if they stop their venlafaxine suddenly, or rarely by missing a few doses. 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 venlafaxine slowly. It is best to discuss this with your pharmacist, doctor or nurse.

What will happen to me when I start taking venlafaxine?

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 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		
ANXIETY	Feeling nervous	This should go with time. If you are worried, contact your doctor.
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.
DIARRHOEA	The "runs", or loose stools	This should wear off fairly quickly. If it becomes a problem, contact your pharmacist or doctor.
DIZZINESS	Feeling light headed.	This should wear off with time. If it is bad, contact your doctor.
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 venlafaxine at a different time. If you are taking the tablets twice a day, it may help to change to the slow release capsules.
HEADACHE	Your head is pounding and painful.	It should be safe to take aspirin or paracetamol.
INSOMNIA	Not able to sleep at night	If you are worried, contact your doctor.
NAUSEA	Feeling sick.	Taking each dose with or after food may help. If it is bad, contact your doctor. Changing to the slow release capsules may help.
SWEATING	Sweating more than normal, especially at night.	If it is bad, see your doctor.
FAIRLY COMMON		
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.
UNCOMMON		
BLURRED VISION	Things look fuzzy and you can't focus properly.	Things look fuzzy and you can't focus properly. See your doctor if you are worried. You won't need glasses.
HYPERTENSION	High blood pressure	This usually only happens if you are taking more than 200mg a day.
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
RASH or URTICARIA	Blotches everywhere on your skin.	Stop taking venlafaxine and contact your doctor now.
TREMOR	Feeling shaky	Contact your doctor now.
VOMITING	Being sick	If it is bad, contact your doctor. Changing to the slow release capsules may help.

What about alcohol?

It is officially recommended that people taking venlafaxine should not drink alcohol. This is because both venlafaxine 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 venlafaxine. Discuss any concerns you may have 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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This leaflet is to help you understand about your medicine. It is not an official manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet. For more information call the UKPPG National Telephone Helpline, 11am to 5pm, Monday to Friday on 020 7919 2999 or visit www.nmhct.nhs.uk/pharmacy

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