

Tricyclic Antidepressants

Tricyclic antidepressants are a class of medications used in pain management for both antidepressant and pain relief properties. These were first introduced in the 1950's and are the most studied and still most effective class of antidepressant pain relievers.

They work by increasing serotonin levels in the brain. While these medications can have cardiac side effects, in general a skilled physician can find a tricyclic drug whose side effects can be used to a good benefit. For example, if you can't sleep, and a medication causes you to be drowsy, then you take the medicine before bed and use that drowsiness to advantage.

The most commonly prescribed drugs in this class are amitriptyline (Elavil®), nortriptyline (Pamelor®), imipramine (Tofranil®), desipramine (Norpramin® and Pertofrane®), and doxepin (Sinequan®). These medications are also used in patients who experience frequent, daily or near-daily headaches. Tricyclic antidepressants may take two to four weeks to show their effectiveness. Some of the possible side effects include drowsiness, dryness of the mouth, weight gain, tingling fingers, and blurred vision. Changes in pulse, heart rhythm, blood pressure, and behavior may also occur.

FAQS about Tricyclic antidepressants

I have a dry mouth from the drug, what can I do?

Try chewing sugarless gum or sucking hard candies. Some people carry small water bottle to frequently wet your mouth.

Can I become addicted to these medicines?

No, but if you have been on them awhile you may need to wean off of them over a week or so.

Why do I need antidepressants if I'm not depressed?

These medications are as much as 80% effective in reducing chronic pain in some conditions.

I slept well at first on the medication but am sleeping less now, what can I do?

You should call your pain doctor. You may need to change the dose.