



### **Amitriptyline (Elavil®, Endep®)**

Amitriptyline was originally developed as an antidepressant, but experience has shown that it has an independent effect on neuropathic pain. Although it is a good antidepressant, the major side effect of drowsiness makes newer medications easier for the treatment of depression. Amitriptyline is now used primarily for sleep, especially in patients with eczema, and for chronic pain.

When used for sleep or nighttime itching, the proper dose is the that dose that produces deep sleep without long-lasting morning drowsiness, which is usually about 20-30 mg. When used for neuropathic pain, an ultimate dose of 125 to 150 mg is often required for comfort.

If you are taking amitriptyline for sleep, you should take from a half to three 25 mg tablets.

If you are taking amitriptyline for pain, you should start your amitriptyline at an extremely low dose. You should start with half of a 10 mg tablet —the smallest available size — and increase your dose as tolerated by a half or whole tablet each evening, until you are comfortable, experience intrusive side effects or reach 150 mg, whichever occurs first. Usually, amitriptyline is best taken an hour or two before bedtime, because the effect of drowsiness is slow to begin, but lasts about 10 hours. Call the office if you are having unpleasant side effects.

When your prescription is finished, call the office for a more potent tablet, so you are not taking several pills each night. Amitriptyline is available in 10 mg, 25 mg, 50mg, 75 mg, 100 mg, and 150 mg size tablets.

Although some people have very few side effects with amitriptyline, others have aggravating problems. Fortunately, if the dose is started very low, your body usually adjusts to the medication and you will be able to increase the dose to an effective amount.

Sleepiness is a common side effect, so, as noted above, you should take your medication an hour or two before bedtime. If you have problems feeling groggy in the morning, try taking your medication earlier in the evening. Also, you may need to increase your medication more slowly. Although some people can increase their medication by 5 mg each night, other people can only increase their medication once a week. If sleepiness is still a problem, call the office, since you may need to change medications.

Other possible side effects include dryness of the eyes and mouth, a common effect seen with all antihistamines. Usually, this effect is minor and eventually goes away. Sucking on sour apple or lemon sugar-free hard candy and using artificial tears can be helpful.

Constipation is common, especially in patients who already have issues with constipation. Be sure to eat high fiber foods, like cereal with 10 to 14 grams of fiber per serving, and drink plenty of a fluid at the same time to control this side effect if it occurs. Other medications that are useful include docusate (Colace®), from one a day to two twice a day, or polyethylene glycol (Miralax®.)

An increase in appetite — especially for sweets — happens to some people. In order to prevent weight gain, count calories until you know if an increased appetite is a side effect for you. If you find that an increased appetite or weight gain is a significant problem for you, call the office.

A rapid heart rate or jitteriness/anxiety are not common, but sometimes occur. Stop the medication and call the office for a change in medication.

It often takes a month or more to reach the dose that will control pain, although a good night's sleep occurs very quickly. After reaching the correct dose for you, expect about another two weeks to experience pain relief. Amitriptyline is not addicting.