

## Depression: Tricyclic and Tetracyclic Antidepressants



Antidepressants help restore the normal balance of brain chemicals. When these chemicals are in proper balance, your depression or anxiety gets better. Tricyclic and tetracyclic medicines work by bringing certain brain chemicals back into balance. They help more than half of people with depression. Because of their side effects, they may not be the choice for everyone.

### Examples

- Amitriptyline (Limbitrol)
- Amoxapine
- Imipramine (Tofranil)

### When do they begin to work?

You may begin to feel better within 1 to 3 weeks of starting this medicine. It can take as many as 6 to 8 weeks to see more improvement. If you have problems or concerns about your medicines, or you do not notice any improvement within 3 weeks, talk to your doctor.

### Your responsibilities when taking this medicine

- Understand the side effects.
- Tell your doctor about any other medical problems you have and all the medicines you take. This includes over-the-counter drugs, herbs, and supplements. Some drugs can cause a bad reaction if you take them with certain other medicines.
- You will need to see your doctor regularly for some time to see how well your medicine is working. Having a long-term, comfortable relationship with your doctor will help your treatment.
- If you think you may not be able to take the drug as prescribed, tell your doctor.
- You may need regular blood tests to check the amount of the medicine in your blood. Too much of this type of drug in your blood can be dangerous.
- Follow your doctor's orders about taking your medicine, even after your symptoms go away. Taking your medicine for at least 6 months after you feel better can help keep you from getting depressed again. Your doctor may want you to take these medicines even longer.

### Side effects

Ask your pharmacist about the side effects of each medicine you take. Side effects are also listed in the information that comes with your medicine. Common side effects of these medicines include:

- Dry mouth.
- Dizziness.
- Drowsiness.
- Headache.

- Weight gain.
- Constipation.

Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine. **Call 911 right away** if you think you are having a serious reaction, such as trouble breathing.

### Things to know

Some of these drugs are not given to older adults because they cause too many side effects. Doctors usually do not prescribe these drugs to people with certain heart problems, such as irregular heartbeats or low blood pressure. Tricyclic antidepressants and tetracyclic drugs should **not** be used along with:

- Certain heart medicines, such as digoxin.
- Certain medicines used to treat seizures, such as phenytoin.

### Precautions when taking this medicine

Do **not** take these drugs along with other kinds of antidepressant drugs called monoamine oxidase inhibitors, or MAOIs, which include isocarboxazid, phenelzine, and tranylcypromine. Serious, sometimes fatal, reactions can occur. You will need to wait several weeks after you stop MAOI treatment before you can begin taking a tricyclic or tetracyclic antidepressant. To avoid problems, tell your doctor about any medicines you have taken recently.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued an advisory on antidepressant medicines and the risk of suicide. The FDA does **not** say to stop using these medicines. Instead, a person taking antidepressants should be watched for warning signs of suicide. This is especially important at the beginning of treatment or when the dose is changed.

### Managing side effects

There are many things you can do to reduce side effects.

Side effect	What can you do?
Constipation	Eat cereals and other high-fiber foods (such as apples, salads, and celery). Drink lots of fluids.
Dry mouth	Use sugarless gum or candy. Take frequent sips of water throughout the day.
Drowsiness	Take your medicine at bedtime. Ask your doctor if you can take less medicine. Do not change how much you take without asking your doctor.
Loss of sexual desire or ability	Ask your doctor if you can change to a medicine that may not have this side effect, or if taking a lower dose would help.

**If you plan to stop taking your medicine, talk with your doctor first about how to do it safely.** Your doctor may want you to slowly decrease your dose. Stopping antidepressants can cause side effects and may cause your health problem to come back or get worse.