

Nortriptyline (Aventyl®)

Why is this medication prescribed?

- Nortriptyline works to treat pain by increasing the concentrations of chemical messengers in the nervous system to reduce the pain messages arriving in the brain.
- Nortriptyline is used to treat pain from damaged nerves. The pain is usually described as burning, tingling, shooting or numb.
- Nortriptyline can also be used in the treatment of fibromyalgia and prevention of migraine headaches.
- Nortriptyline was once widely used as an antidepressant. The dose used to treat pain conditions is lower than that used to treat depression.

How should this medication be used?

- Nortriptyline comes as a capsule in the following strengths: 10mg and 25mg.
- It is taken once a day, usually in the evening/a couple hours prior to bedtime. Take your dose at the same time each day.
- To minimize the development of side effects, nortriptyline is typically started as 10mg at bedtime and then increased in 10mg increments based on tolerability/effect. The final nortriptyline dose will be different for each patient.
- Nortriptyline is **NOT** a "pain killer" to be taken whenever pain becomes severe or for managing minor aches and pains. Nortriptyline should be **taken on a consistent basis**, according to your doctor's orders to help you control long-term pain.
- Do **NOT** abruptly stop taking nortriptyline without talking to your doctor. If for some reason nortriptyline is no longer needed, your doctor will reduce your dose gradually.

When does this medication start to work?

As the nortriptyline dose is slowly adjusted to improve tolerability, it may take a little while before you notice the pain management benefits of this medication. It may take about 4 weeks of nortriptyline use to notice an improvement in pain control.

What special precautions should I follow?

- Before using nortriptyline tell your doctor if you have had any of the following health issues:
 - Glaucoma
 - Bipolar disorder
 - Seizure disorder
 - Heart disease
 - Overactive thyroid
 - Trouble urinating
 - Are pregnant or breastfeeding or this situation is likely in the near future
- Do not take nortriptyline with a monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI) (e.g., antidepressants phenelzine, tranylcypromine, or moclobemide; Parkinson's disease medications selegiline or rasagiline) or within 14 days of discontinuing a MAOI medication.

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- Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of the medications you take (prescription, non-prescription, herbals, over-the-counter products, etc.) so drug interactions can be minimized.
- It is best to wait until your body adjusts to this new medication or a dose change before driving or operating machinery.
- If alcohol is used with nortriptyline it can result in more drowsiness. It is best not to drink alcohol when first starting nortriptyline and your body is adjusting to the new medication.

What should I do if I forget a dose?

- Take the missed dose as soon as you remember it unless it is almost time for the next dose. In this case, skip the missed dose and continue your regular dosing schedule.
- Do **NOT** take a double dose to make up for a missed dose.

What side effects can this medication cause?

All medicines can cause side effects, which may range from mild to severe.

Possible side effects of nortriptyline include:

- Drowsiness/sedation
 - If you experience a “hangover” effect in the morning after taking nortriptyline, try taking the medication earlier in the evening. For example, take nortriptyline 12 hours prior to the time you want to wake up.
- Dry mouth – use sugarfree gum/lozenges or Biotene® mouth rinses to help reduce this
- Blurred vision
- Constipation
- Difficulty urinating
- Dizziness
- Weight gain
- Confusion
- Heart rhythm disturbances (at higher doses)

Remember that your doctor has prescribed this medication because he or she has judged that the benefit to you is greater than the risk of side effects. Many people using this medication do not have serious side effects.

What storage conditions are needed for this medication?

- Keep this medication in the container it came in, tightly closed and out of reach of children.
- Store at room temperature, away from excess heat/moisture (not in the kitchen or bathroom).
- If at any point in the future nortriptyline is stopped by your doctor, return any remaining supply to your community pharmacist for proper medication disposal.