

Topiramate (Topamax®)

Why is this medication prescribed?

- To prevent migraine headaches, treat nerve related pain or control certain types of seizures in patients with epilepsy.

How should this medication be used?

- Topiramate is available as:
 - a tablet in the following strengths: 25 mg, 100 mg, or 200 mg
 - a sprinkle capsule in the following strengths: 15 mg or 25 mg
- It can be taken with or without food, but **should be taken with water** to reduce the risk of developing kidney stones.
- It can be taken either once daily or twice daily depending on the dose. To minimize the development of side effects, topiramate is usually started at a low dose and increased in weekly intervals. Doses should be taken at the same time each day.
- Examples of topiramate dosing schedules:

Example A

Week 1: take 25 mg at bedtime
 Week 2: take 50 mg at bedtime
 Week 3: take 75 mg at bedtime
 Week 4: take 100 mg at bedtime

Example B

Week 1: take 25 mg at bedtime
 Week 2: take 25 mg twice daily
 Week 3: take 25 mg in morning, 50 mg at bedtime
 Week 4: take 50 mg twice a day

- Topiramate is **NOT** a "pain killer" to be taken whenever pain becomes severe or for managing minor aches and pains. Topiramate 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 topiramate without talking to your doctor. If for some reason topiramate is no longer needed, your doctor will reduce your dose gradually to minimize the potential for seizures.

When does this medication start to work?

- The dose is slowly titrated to improve tolerability so it may take a little while before you notice the pain management benefits of this medication. You should see some improvement within 4 weeks of reaching the minimum pain-relieving dose.
- When used to prevent migraine headaches, topiramate should be used for 8 weeks at the target dose before being assessed for effectiveness. If there is no improvement in migraine headaches after 8 weeks of topiramate at the target dose, the dose should be tapered down in 25 mg/day increments every week until it is stopped. If topiramate proves helpful for reducing migraine headache frequency/intensity, it should be continued for 9 months and then re-assessed for continued need or potential weaning.

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What special precautions should I follow?

- Before using topiramate talk to your doctor if you have had any of the following health issues:
 - Glaucoma
 - Kidney stones
 - An eating disorder
 - Are pregnant or breastfeeding or this situation is likely in the near future
- When topiramate is first tried, it is best to wait until your body adjusts to this new medication or a dose change before driving or operating machinery.
- 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.

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. The most common side effects of topiramate are:

- Difficulty concentrating, word-finding difficulties, forgetfulness, coordination problems
- Fatigue and dizziness
- Weight loss (more noticeable at higher doses and when taken for longer periods of time). Check your weight before starting on topiramate to obtain a baseline value.
- Paresthesia (tingling). Although a common side effect when used for migraine prevention, this tingling sensation doesn't cause harm. It happens as a result of how the drug works.

Inform your doctor **immediately** if you notice/develop:

- New difficulties with mood or worsening mood, behavioural or emotional changes, or have thoughts of self-harm when taking topiramate
- Vision problems such as blurry or double vision, eye pain, sudden worsening of vision. Topiramate has been reported to trigger severe nearsightedness along with increased pressure in the eye. If this rare side effect develops, symptoms typically occur within a few days to 1 month of initiating topiramate. If this develops, topiramate will be stopped.
- Kidney stones
- Decreased sweating, increased body temperature, persistent lack of energy, loss of appetite, and confused thinking.

Remember, 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.

How should I store 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).

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- If at any point in the future topiramate is stopped by your doctor, return any remaining supply to your community pharmacist for proper medication disposal.

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