

Venlafaxine XR (Effexor®)

Why is this medication prescribed?

- Venlafaxine works by increasing the brain levels of 2 chemical messengers, norepinephrine and serotonin, that help to lessen the intensity of incoming pain signals.
- Venlafaxine treats pain from damaged nerves. It is sometimes used to treat fibromyalgia.
- Venlafaxine is also used to treat depression and anxiety.

How should this medication be used?

- Venlafaxine XR comes as a capsule in the following strengths: 37.5 mg, 75 mg, or 150 mg.
- Venlafaxine XR should be taken by mouth once daily with food.
- Take your dose at the same time each day. If venlafaxine XR makes you tired, take it in the evening. If venlafaxine XR makes you feel more activated, take it in the morning.
- To minimize the development of side effects, venlafaxine XR is usually started at a low dose and slowly increased until a dose of 150 mg to 225 mg/day is reached. For example:
 - Week 1: take 37.5 mg once daily
 - Week 2: take 75 mg once daily
 - Week 3: take 112.5 mg once daily
 - Week 4: take 150 mg once daily
- Venlafaxine is **NOT** a "pain killer" to be taken whenever pain becomes severe or for managing minor aches and pains. Venlafaxine 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 venlafaxine without talking to your doctor. Sudden stopping of this medication can cause severe headache, poor sleep, nausea, panic attack and agitation. If venlafaxine is no longer needed, your doctor will reduce your dose gradually.

When does this medication start to work?

Given that the dose is slowly titrated to improve tolerability, it may take a little while before you notice the pain management benefits of this medication. You should be seeing some improvement within 4 weeks of reaching the minimum pain-relieving dose.

What special precautions should I follow?

- Before using venlafaxine XR talk to your doctor if you have any of the following health issues:
 - Glaucoma
 - Bipolar disorder
 - Seizure disorder
 - Kidney or liver disease
 - Hypertension (high blood pressure)
 - Are pregnant or breastfeeding or this situation is likely in the near future.
- Do not take venlafaxine with a monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI) medication (e.g., the antidepressants phenelzine, tranylcypromine, or moclobemide; the Parkinson's disease

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medications selegiline or rasagiline) or within 14 days of discontinuing a MAOI medication.

- When venlafaxine 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.
 - Venlafaxine should **NOT** be taken with alcohol.
 - Bruising/bleeding risk may increase when venlafaxine is taken with “blood thinner” medications or NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) like ibuprofen.

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 venlafaxine are:

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| • Dry mouth – use sugarfree gum/lozenges or Biotene® mouth rinses to help reduce this | • Dizziness |
| • Drowsiness or trouble sleeping | • Nausea |
| • Constipation | • Headache |
| | • Decreased appetite |
| | • Increased sweating |

Venlafaxine can increase blood pressure (particularly when taken at higher doses). Venlafaxine may also cause or worsen sexual dysfunction.

- Inform your doctor immediately if you notice:
 - New difficulties with mood or worsening mood, behavioural or emotional changes or have thoughts of self-harm when taking venlafaxine
 - When used to treat depression and other mental health conditions, antidepressant medications have infrequently been associated with increased risk of suicidal thinking, feeling, and behavior in children, adolescents and young adults.
- Symptoms of serotonin syndrome (a condition where there is too much serotonin that is typically due to a drug interaction)

- Shivering, overactive reflexes (twitching/muscle jerks), increased body temperature, changes in blood pressure/heart rate/breathing, agitation/restlessness, sweating.

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.

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