

Clozapine (pron. cloz-a-peen)

What is clozapine used for?

Clozapine (also known as (Clozaril, Denzapine and Zaponex) is used to help treat the symptoms of schizophrenia. It can only be taken by people who have not got better with at least two other antipsychotics or neuroleptics. It is made as tablets and a syrup.

What is the usual dose of clozapine?

The usual dose of clozapine is around 300-600mg a day, but can be up to 900mg a day.

How should I take clozapine?

Swallow the tablets with at least half a glass of water whilst sitting or standing, to make sure that they reach the stomach and do not stick in your throat. For the liquid, use a medicine spoon, dropper or an oral syringe. You must shake the bottle **really** well or some of the clozapine powder will stick to the bottom of the bottle.

When should I take clozapine?

Take your clozapine as directed on the medicine label. Try to take it at regular times each day. Taking it at mealtimes may make it easier for you to remember as there is no problem about taking clozapine with or after food. If the label says to take it once a day this is usually best at bedtime as it will make you drowsy at first.

What are the alternatives to clozapine?

There are many other antipsychotics, talking therapies and treatments for schizophrenia, although you may already have had several of them. See our "Handy charts" to help you compare the medicines, how they work and their side effects.

How long will clozapine take to work?

Clozapine may take several weeks to start working, and you may carry on getting better for many months or even longer. Please look at one of the "Handy charts" for more help and advice on this.

How long will I need to keep taking clozapine for?

Please look at one of the "Handy charts" for more help and advice on how long you might need to take it for. If it works for you, you might want to take it for very many years.

Can I stop taking clozapine suddenly?

It is unwise to stop taking it suddenly, even if you feel better. Your symptoms can return if treatment is stopped too early. This may occur some weeks or even months after clozapine has been stopped. If the time comes, you should withdraw clozapine by a gradual reduction in the dose over several weeks. You should discuss this fully with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. If you get a blood problem you can stop suddenly but only with medical care.

What should I do if I forget to take a dose of clozapine?

Take the missed dose as soon as you remember unless it is within about 4-6 hours of your next dose. If you remember after this just take the next dose as normal. **Do not try to catch up by taking two doses at once as you may get more side-effects.** You also risk having a seizure or fit if you take a double dose. If you miss more than 2 days doses (48 hours) you will need to start again with a low dose – if you start again at your old dose you may get a sudden drop in blood pressure. If you have problems remembering your doses (as many people do) ask your pharmacist, doctor or nurse about this. There are some special packs, boxes and devices that can be used to help you remember.

Can I drink alcohol or smoke while I am taking clozapine?

If you drink alcohol while taking clozapine it may make you feel more sleepy. This is particularly important if you need to drive or operate machinery. You must seek advice on this. You must let your doctor know if you start to smoke or stop smoking while you are taking clozapine (see next question).

Will clozapine affect my other medication?

Clozapine has quite a few interactions with other medicines.

- The effects of clozapine can sometimes be increased by sertraline, paroxetine, fluvoxamine, fluoxetine, erythromycin
- The effect of clozapine can be decreased by phenytoin, phenobarbital or smoking.
 - NB If you stop **smoking** while on clozapine, then the levels of clozapine can nearly double (which could make you really unwell). You must let your doctor or nurse know if you are planning on giving up smoking, reducing smoking or have stopped
- Clozapine can increase the sedative effects of benzodiazepines (e.g. lorazepam, temazepam) or alcohol
- You should have no problems with "The Contraceptive Pill" and clozapine

Not all of these interactions happen in everyone. Some of these medicines can still be used together but you will need to follow your doctor's instructions carefully. There are many other possible drug interactions. Make sure that your GP knows you are taking clozapine (because if your supply comes from a hospital, then he or she may forget or not know).

What sort of side-effects might occur if I am taking clozapine?

The table over the next page will show you some of the main side effects you might get from clozapine.

Side effect	What happens	What to do about it
COMMON (<i>more than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Sleepiness	Feeling sleepy or sluggish for a few hours after a dose	Don't drive or use machinery. Ask your doctor if you can take your clozapine at a different time.
Hypersalivation	You dribble and your mouth gets full of saliva or spit. Your pillow is wet in the morning.	This is not dangerous, but can be upsetting. Your doctor may be able to give you a medicine (e.g. hyoscine) to help this. Propping up pillows at night helps some people a bit.
Postural hypotension	A low blood pressure - this can make you feel dizzy.	Try not to stand up too quickly. If you feel dizzy, don't drive.
Weight gain	Eating more and putting on weight.	A diet full of vegetables and fibre may help prevent weight gain.
Constipation	When you want to poop but can't (the opposite of diarrhoea). You can't pass a motion.	Make sure you eat enough fibre, cereal or fruit and drink enough fluid. Get some exercise e.g. walking. If this does not help ask your doctor or pharmacist for a laxative. If it goes on for more than a few days contact your doctor as this can be dangerous
UNCOMMON (<i>less than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Extra-pyramidal or Parkinsonian side effects	Having shaky hands and feeling very restless.	It is not usually dangerous and is a well known side effect. If it is distressing or worries you, tell your doctor. He or she may be able to give you a medicine for it e.g. an anticholinergic.
Fever or flu-like symptoms	A high temperature.	Make sure you check with your doctor or pharmacist to make sure you do not have a blood problem. If not, try paracetamol. Always tell your doctor or carer if you get an unexpected fever, sore throat or illness.
Diabetes	You lose weight, pass lots of urine, and feel thirsty and hungry all the time.	Tell your doctor if you get these symptoms. You can then have some simple tests to see if you are getting diabetes.
Palpitations	A fast heart beat.	Let your doctor know, especially if this happens in the first few weeks.
Nocturnal enuresis or urinary incontinence	Not being able to have a wee or passing urine when you don't want to e.g. during the night.	Talk to your doctor or nurse about this. It may be that a change in dose or when you take your dose or doses might help. Sometimes taking another medicine can help.
RARE BUT IMPORTANT (<i>around 1 in 100 people might get these</i>)		
Agranulocytosis or neutropenia	Low numbers of white cells in the blood. You may get more infections.	This will be picked up from your blood tests. It happens in about 2 or 3 in 100 people. Always tell your doctor or carer if you get an unexpected fever, sore throat or illness.
Seizures	Having a fit or convulsion.	Stop taking clozapine and contact your doctor immediately.

Do not be worried by this list of side effects. Some people get no side effects at all and others may get some effects that are not listed in this table. If you think you might have a side effect to your medicine, you should ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. If you want to know more, go to our website for links to other websites with more information.

Will I need a blood test if I am taking clozapine?

Yes. You will need a blood test before you start, every week for 18 weeks, then every 2 weeks for a year. If everything is OK, you will then only need a test every 4 weeks after that. This is because clozapine can upset the blood of about two in every hundred people taking it. You may also need extra blood tests if it is thought possible your blood is being affected. You must not miss these tests. Your doctor and pharmacist will not be able to let you have any more tablets if you do.

Can I drive or cycle while I am taking clozapine?

You will feel a bit sleepy at first when taking clozapine. Until this wears off, or you know how clozapine affects you, do not drive or operate machinery. You should be careful as it may slow down your reaction times.

The small print: This leaflet is to help you understand about your medicine. You should also read the manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet (PIL). You may find lots more on the internet but beware as internet-based information is not always accurate. Do not share medicines with anyone else. Go to our website for fuller answers to these and many other questions e.g. driving, women's health, how it works, doses and interactions, and about the conditions. The "Handy charts" will help you compare the main medicines for each condition, how they work and their side effects.