

Escitalopram (pron. s-sit-al-o-pram)

What is escitalopram used for?

Escitalopram (also known as Cipralex[®]) is mainly used to help treat the symptoms of depression, anxiety, and OCD. It can also help social anxiety, PTSD, panic, PMS and seasonal affective disorder. It is known as an SSRI (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor). It is made as tablets and a liquid.

What is the usual dose of escitalopram?

The usual dose of escitalopram is around 10mg to 20mg a day, except in people over 65, where the top dose is 10mg a day.

How should I take escitalopram?

Swallow the tablets with at least half a glass of water whilst sitting or standing. This is to make sure that they reach the stomach and do not stick in your throat. For the liquid, use the dropper. Use it carefully to make sure you measure the correct amount.

When should I take escitalopram?

Take your escitalopram as directed on the medicine label. There is no problem about taking escitalopram with or after food. If the label says to take it once a day this is usually best in the morning at breakfast.

What are the alternatives to escitalopram?

This will depend on what you are taking it for. There are many other medicines (e.g. other SSRIs, mirtazapine, venlafaxine), talking therapies and treatments for depression, anxiety and other symptoms. See our "Handy charts" to help you compare the medicines, how they work and their side effects.

How long will escitalopram take to work?

This will depend on what you are taking it for. For depression, the effect will start in a week or two, and carry on building for the next few weeks. Please look at one of the "Handy charts" for more help.

How long will I need to keep taking escitalopram for?

This will depend on what you are taking it for. Please look one of at the "Handy charts" for more help and advice on how long you might need to take it for.

Is escitalopram addictive?

Escitalopram is not addictive as such, but if you stop it suddenly you may get some discontinuation effects. This is not very common with escitalopram. At worst, these could include headache, restlessness, diarrhoea, nausea, 'flu-like symptoms, tiredness, stomach cramps, and sleep disturbances (e.g. more vivid dreams). They can start shortly after stopping or reducing doses, are usually short lived, will go if escitalopram is started again and can even occur with missed doses.

Can I stop taking escitalopram 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 escitalopram has been stopped. When the time comes, you should withdraw escitalopram by a gradual reduction in the dose over several weeks. You should discuss this fully with your doctor.

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

Take the missed dose as soon as you remember unless it is within about 8-12 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. If you have problems remembering your doses (as very 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 while I am taking escitalopram?

If you drink alcohol while taking escitalopram it may make you feel more sleepy. This is particularly important if you need to drive or operate machinery and you must seek advice on this.

Will escitalopram affect my other medication?

Escitalopram has a few interactions with other medicines:

- Taking escitalopram with other medicines that also boost serotonin can cause flu-like symptoms. See your doctor straight away if this happens.
- If escitalopram is taken with benzodiazepines or alcohol, it may cause more sleepiness.

- You should have no problems with "The Contraceptive Pill" and escitalopram.
- 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.

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

The table below will show you some of the main side effects you might get from escitalopram.

Side effect	What happens	What to do about it
COMMON (<i>more than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Nausea and vomiting	Feeling sick and being sick.	Take your escitalopram with or after food. If you are sick for more than a day, contact your doctor. This tends to wear off after a few days or a week or so.
Insomnia	Not being able to get to sleep at night.	Make sure you take your dose in the morning. It may be possible to change the time of your dose, or reduce the dose a little to start with.
Sexual dysfunction	Finding it hard to have an orgasm. No desire for sex.	Discuss with your doctor.
LESS COMMON (<i>less than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Sleepiness	Feeling sleepy or sluggish. It can last for a few hours after taking your dose.	Don't drive or use machinery. Ask your doctor if you can take escitalopram at a different time of day.
Headache	Your head is pounding and painful.	Try paracetamol. Your pharmacist will be able to advise if this is safe to take with any other medicines you may be taking.
Loss of appetite	Not feeling hungry. You may lose weight.	If this is a problem, contact your doctor or pharmacist for advice.
Diarrhoea	Going to the toilet more than usual and passing loose, watery stools.	Drink plenty of water. Get advice from your pharmacist. If it lasts for more than a day or so, contact your doctor.
UNCOMMON (<i>less than about 1 in 100 people might get these</i>)		
Restlessness or anxiety	Being more on edge. You may sweat a lot more.	Try and relax by taking deep breaths. Wear loose fitting clothes. This often happens early on and should gradually ease off over several weeks. A lower starting dose may help sometimes.
RARE (<i>less than about 1 in 1000 people might get these</i>)		
Rashes and pruritis	Rashes anywhere on the skin. These may be itchy (pruritis).	Stop taking and contact your doctor now.
Dry mouth	Not much saliva or spit.	Suck sugar-free gum or boiled sweets. If it is bad, your doctor may be able to give you a mouth spray.
Skin rashes	Blotches seen on the skin.	Stop taking and contact your doctor now.
Tremors and dystonias	Feeling shaky. You may get a twitch or feel stiff.	It is not dangerous. If it troubles you, contact your doctor.

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 escitalopram?

You should not need any blood tests with escitalopram.

Can I drive or cycle while I am taking escitalopram?

You may feel a bit sleepy at first when taking escitalopram. Until this wears off, or you know how escitalopram 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.