

Lamotrigine (pron. lamb-ot-ree-jean)

What is lamotrigine used for?

Lamotrigine (also known as Lamictal[®]) is mainly used to help treat the symptoms of epilepsy but can be used to help stop the symptoms of bipolar depression returning. It is made as tablets and dispersible tablets.

What is the usual dose of lamotrigine?

Because it can cause skin problems, you should start at 25mg a day for two weeks, then increase to 50mg a day for two weeks. The dose can then be increased every week or two after that. This start needs to be even slower if you are also taking valproate. The usual final dose of lamotrigine is around 50-200mg a day.

How should I take lamotrigine?

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. The dispersible tablets can be chewed or dispersed in water and then swallowed.

When should I take lamotrigine?

Take your lamotrigine 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 lamotrigine with or after food. If the label says to take it once a day this is usually best at bedtime as it may make you drowsy at first. If you are taking more than 100mg a day this should usually be taken twice a day.

What are the alternatives to lamotrigine?

There are many other anticonvulsants and treatments for epilepsy, and some other medicines (e.g. quetiapine), talking therapies and treatments for bipolar depression. See our "Handy charts" to help you compare the medicines, how they work and their side effects.

How long will lamotrigine take to work?

This will depend on what you are taking it for. It may take as long as a month or two to start to work. The effect builds over the next few months. Please look at one of the "Handy charts" for more help and advice.

How long will I need to keep taking lamotrigine for?

This will depend on what you are taking it for. If it works you may want to take it for several years. Please see our website for more help and advice.

Is lamotrigine addictive?

Lamotrigine is not addictive.

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

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

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. 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 while I am taking lamotrigine?

If you drink alcohol while taking lamotrigine 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 lamotrigine affect my other medication?

Lamotrigine has a few interactions with other medicines:

- The effects of lamotrigine can sometimes be increased by sertraline or valproate (Epilim[®], Convulex[®], Depakote[®])
- The effect of lamotrigine can be decreased by carbamazepine (Tegretol[®]), lopinavir/ritonavir (Kaletra[®]), phenytoin or oral contraceptives ("The Pill")

- Lamotrigine can sometimes decrease the effect of oral contraceptives. If you are on lamotrigine and then start taking "the Pill", your dose of lamotrigine will probably need to be increased. In fact, it may need to be doubled. If you are taking lamotrigine and then stop taking "The Contraceptive Pill", your dose of lamotrigine may need to be reduced. This should be done during the first week after you stop.

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 lamotrigine?

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

Side effect	What happens	What to do about it
COMMON (<i>more than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Sleepiness	You feel sleepy or sluggish. It can last for a few hours after taking your dose, or longer.	Don't drive or use machinery. Discuss with your doctor if you can take the drug at a different time of the day.
Dizziness	Feeling light-headed and faint.	Don't stand up too quickly. Try and lie or sit down if you feel it coming on. Don't drive.
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.
Skin rashes	Red rashes across the face and body, blisters and inflammation in the nose, mouth and eyes. It may look a bit like serious burning or sunburn.	Stop taking and contact your doctor straight away. This can be dangerous as it might be the start of the rare Stevens-Johnson syndrome.
Nausea	Feeling sick.	If it is bad, contact your doctor.
UNCOMMON (<i>less than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Oedema	Swelling in the legs, face, lips or tongue.	Call your doctor now.
Blurred vision	Things look fuzzy and you can't focus your eyes properly.	Don't drive. See your doctor if you are worried.
RARE (<i>less than about 1 in 100 people might get these</i>)		
Bone marrow suppression	Unexpected bruising, infections, and anaemia	Stop taking and contact your doctor straight away.
Seizures	Having a fit or convulsion, or a worsening of your symptoms.	Stop taking and contact your doctor straight away.

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 lamotrigine?

You may need blood tests while you are taking lamotrigine to check on your blood.

Can I drive or cycle while I am taking lamotrigine?

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

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.