

# Tricyclic Antidepressants (TCAs)



## Pain Service

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[www.bcchildrens.ca](http://www.bcchildrens.ca)

## Tricyclic Antidepressants (TCAs)

- ▶ Amitriptyline (Elavil®, Apo-amitriptyline®)
- ▶ Nortriptyline (Aventyl®, other)
- ▶ Imipramine (Impril®, Apo-imipramine®)
- ▶ Doxepin (Triadapin®, Novo-Doxepin®)
- ▶ Trimipramine (Rhotrimine®, Apo-Trimip®)
- ▶ Clomipramine (Anafranil®)
- ▶ Desipramine (Norpramin®)

### What are TCAs?

This group of medications was first made to treat depression. Tricyclic antidepressants TCAs have since been found to be effective for many types of pain, including headache pain, nerve pain and other chronic pain conditions. When used for pain, the TCA doses are lower than those used for depression. We know that this group of medications works by altering the levels of certain transmitters in the brain such as noradrenalin, serotonin. TCAs may be used alone or in combination with other medications.

You should take this medication regularly to prevent or reduce the pain that you experience. It may take several weeks before you start to feel better.

### How to use and store this medication:

- ▶ Take this medication with or without food.
- ▶ If you take only one dose a day, take it at bedtime.
- ▶ Store the medication out of reach of children.
- ▶ Store the medication at room temperature away from heat, moisture and direct light.

### If you miss a dose:

- ▶ If you miss a dose or forget to take your medication, take it as soon as you remember. However, if it is almost time for your next dose, do not take the missed dose or double your next dose. Instead, continue your regular dosing schedule. If you are unsure what to do about a missed dose, contact your doctor or pharmacist.
- ▶ If you take only one dose at bedtime and you miss the dose, do not take the medication in the morning. Wait until the next night.
- ▶ Do **not** take extra medication to make up for a missed dose

### Drugs and food to avoid:

- ▶ Ask your doctor or pharmacist before using any other medication, including non-prescription medications, vitamins and herbal products.

### Warnings:

- ▶ Make sure your doctor knows if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, or if you have kidney, liver or heart disease, glaucoma or seizures.
- ▶ Do **not** stop taking this medication suddenly without asking your doctor. This medication is usually decreased slowly before it is stopped completely
- ▶ This medication may make you dizzy or drowsy. Do not drive or do anything dangerous until you know how this medication makes you feel.

### Side effects:

This list of side effects is important for you to be aware of; however, it is also important to remember that not all side effects happen to all people.

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These are some less serious side effects of taking TCAs. Many of these less serious side effects will improve over the first few days of taking the medication.

If you have problems with these less serious side effects, talk with your doctor or pharmacist:

- ▶ Nervousness, trouble sleeping
- ▶ Tiredness, dizziness
- ▶ Blurred vision
- ▶ Stomach upset
- ▶ Trouble with urination
- ▶ Diarrhea or constipation
- ▶ Dry mouth
- ▶ Weight changes



**Call your doctor right away if you have any of these side effects:**

- ▶ Confusion, agitation, hallucinations
- ▶ Seizures
- ▶ Fainting
- ▶ Fast or irregular heartbeat
- ▶ Muscle stiffness
- ▶ Shortness of breath or trouble breathing
- ▶ Skin rash or hives

**If you have any other side effects that you think are caused by this medication, tell your doctor or pharmacist.**

- ▶ If this medication upsets your stomach, try taking it with food.
- ▶ This medication may make your skin more sensitive to sunlight. Try to stay out of direct sunlight and wear protective clothing and a sun block with SPF 15 or higher.
- ▶ If you experience dry mouth try chewing sugarless gum, taking sips of water or using a saliva substitute.



If you have questions about pain management in children, call:

- BCCH Pain Service at 604-875-2345 ext 5108 or
- Call for free if you live in BC at 1-888-3088 extension (5108).

**It's good to ask.**

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*Developed by the health care professionals of the BCCH Pain Service with assistance from the Department of Learning & Development*