

TRICYCLIC ANTIDEPRESSANTS

You May Be at Risk For a Fall

If you are taking one of these medications:

Amitriptyline

- Elavil

Amoxapine

Desipramine

- Norpramin

Doxepin

- Silenor

Imipramine

- Tofranil

Nortriptyline

- Pamelor

Protriptyline

Trimipramine

Consult your doctor

These medications are used for depression, anxiety, and other conditions that impact mood, sleep disturbances, and pain, among other uses. Check with your psychiatrist before changing or stopping these medications.

Test Your Knowledge About Tricyclic Antidepressants

	TRUE	FALSE
1. These medications do not have side effects if taken for a long time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Low doses of this medication do not cause side effects.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Stopping this medication may cause my original symptoms to return.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. These medications are the best option to treat sleep problems, pain, or depression.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Answers

1 FALSE: These medications do not have side effects if taken for a long time.

These medications are not recommended for long term use in people older than 65 years. This is because people who take it are at risk of:

- Memory and concentration problems
- Problems with constipation and bladder control
- Feeling tired during the day
- Irregular heartbeats
- Dizziness, falls and bone fractures
- Motor vehicle crashes

2 FALSE: Low doses of this medication do not cause side effects.

Even if you take a small dose, this medication may have side effects. It may worsen your mental ability and slow your reflexes, which can lead to injury such as a fracture.

3 TRUE: Stopping this medication may cause my original symptoms to return.

Stopping this medication can cause symptoms to return, but there are other ways to manage your symptoms. Working with your healthcare professional to gradually reduce this medication can lower your risk of side effects and falls. Your healthcare professional can help you identify alternative treatments.

4 FALSE: These medications are the best option to treat sleep disturbances, pain, or depression.

This medication may relieve symptoms of pain, insomnia or depression, but it does not solve the underlying problem. It can also cause side effects that increase your risk of falls or injuries. Alternate treatments are available.



Want to learn more?

We've enclosed some information with resources on how to develop healthier sleep habits and manage pain. This information can help you choose a safer alternative.

Did you know?

- ▶ As you age, these medications remain in your body for longer periods of time. This happens because our liver and kidneys take more time to remove medications. This means a dose that was once safe may start causing side effects.
- ▶ These medications can impair balance, increase falls and fractures, and cause memory problems and urinary retention. These medications may also cause daytime drowsiness, which could result in a car crash.
- ▶ Other treatments can help improve sleep and relieve pain with fewer side effects. The best choice for your overall quality of life is usually a treatment that doesn't increase your risk for a fall.

Even if you are NOT experiencing side effects, talk with your doctor or pharmacist about safer treatment options.



So ask yourself

	YES	NO
• Are you often tired or sleepy during the day?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Do you ever feel hungover in the morning, even though you have not been drinking? Hangover symptoms include headache, nausea, dizziness, or sensitivity to light.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Do you ever have problems with your memory or your balance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, talk to your doctor or pharmacist to see if this medicine is causing your symptoms.

Consult your doctor

These medications can increase fall risk. However, it is important that you discuss this with your healthcare professional before making any changes, as they may be medically necessary for you.



Alternatives for Tricyclic Antidepressants

If you are taking one for sleep:

Insomnia is when you have trouble falling or staying asleep. There are strategies you can try at home to help with insomnia:

- Do not read or watch TV in bed. Watching TV or reading in bed might make it harder for you to fall asleep.
- Go to bed at the same time every night even on the weekends.
- Avoid caffeine, chocolate, and nicotine at least 5 hours before bedtime.
- Avoid alcohol or heavy meals close to bedtime.
- Keep your room quiet, relaxing, and at a cool temperature when sleeping.
- Stop using cellphones, tablets, laptops or other electronic devices at least 30 minutes before bedtime.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist about using a sleep diary, which can help you understand disruptive sleep patterns.
- Discuss alternative treatments with your doctor or pharmacist.

If you are taking one for chronic pain:

There are other solutions to deal with your chronic pain. Using several may help.

Self-care

- Get 7-8 hours of sleep most nights
- Eat a balanced diet with fruits and vegetables.
- Maintain a healthy body weight.
- Incorporate physical exercise to your daily routine to increase your strength, flexibility, and endurance. Exercise programs at senior centers and other community organizations can improve mental and physical health and reduce your risk of falling.



Mrs. Grant's Story

Mrs. Grant was taking Elavil, a drug like the one you're taking.

"I am 68 years old. I took Elavil for 10 years. A few months ago, I fell getting out of bed. I read that this medication can make people dizzy when they stand up. Maybe that's why I fell.

I took Elavil to help me sleep because sometimes I wake up at night from tingling pain in my feet—what my doctor called nerve pain.

My doctor helped me gradually stop taking Elavil. She gave me advice about ways to sleep better, like by getting exercise during the day. She also helped me get my diabetes under control which has improved the tingling pain. I haven't fallen again since I made these changes, so I feel that I made the right choice to stop taking Elavil."

Alternatives for Tricyclic Antidepressants cont'd.

Medications, procedures, and devices

- Try topical pain medications or lidocaine patches that you can apply to the area with pain.
- Ask your doctor about other oral medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil).
- Talk to your doctor about trying TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation). TENS uses low-voltage electrical currents to relieve pain. A TENS unit is a small device that delivers the current at or near your nerves to block or change your perception of pain. Healthcare professionals use TENS to treat a range of conditions, including osteoarthritis, tendinitis, and fibromyalgia.

Improving pain management skills

- Taking a multidisciplinary approach can help with pain relief by addressing multiple factors of the condition. Your doctor can help you coordinate the treatments from multiple therapies.
- Talk to a therapist about a self-management program for pain. A self-management program can help you take control of how you deal with pain.
- Speak to a therapist about cognitive behavioral therapies or mindfulness-based interventions for pain. These therapies change the way you think about pain so that your body and mind react better when you experience pain.
- Speak to a therapist for help with sleep problems. Effective treatments are available.
- Depending on your diagnosis, physical therapy or massage therapy might help the pain you are experiencing. Some physical activities such as yoga, Tai Chi, Pilates, and other structured exercise programs can help with pain.
- Acupuncture can relieve pain and discomfort from a variety of conditions. Ask your doctor if acupuncture is recommended for your condition.

Resource

Go4Life exercise program. Free videos and an “Exercise & Physical Activity” guide. <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/exercise-and-physical-activity>

Tapering-off program

Following a schedule directed by your doctor or pharmacist to slowly lower your antidepressant medication dose, also called tapering, can help reduce the risk of withdrawal symptoms.

Tapering schedules often take longer than five weeks and you may need to use multiple copies of this page for a full taper. A typical tapering schedule for antidepressants is approximately 1-2 months.

Ask your doctor to complete the chart below for your own tapering schedule:

TAPER SCHEDULE								
Week	Time of day	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Week	Morning							
	Noon							
	Afternoon							
	Evening							
Week	Morning							
	Noon							
	Afternoon							
	Evening							
Week	Morning							
	Noon							
	Afternoon							
	Evening							
Week	Morning							
	Noon							
	Afternoon							
	Evening							

Please consult your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist before stopping any medication.

