

Clozapine – Information for Patients and Caregivers

Why did my doctor prescribe clozapine?

- Clozapine is a drug for the treatment of the symptoms of schizophrenia in adults who do not respond to or have serious side effects with other drugs for the same purpose.
- While taking clozapine, it is possible you may have some side effects. Clozapine requires regular blood testing to monitor for a rare side effect that can cause a decrease in white blood cells.

How do I take clozapine?

- The dosage in each individual case is decided by the doctor based on the severity of your symptoms. For treatment to be successful, you must follow your doctor's instructions exactly. Never take more or less than the prescribed dose. If you think your dosage is too weak or too strong, discuss this with your doctor.
- Treatment is usually started with one-half of a 25 mg tablet once or twice a day and gradually increased until you reach your ideal dose.

What should I do if I miss taking a dose of clozapine?

- If you miss a dose and remember within 2 hours, take the dose right away. Otherwise, skip the missed dose and continue with your regular dosing schedule.
- **If you miss taking your dose for more than 2 days, do not start taking your clozapine again. Contact your doctor for instructions on how to restart.**

Interactions with Clozapine

- Tell your doctor or pharmacist about any other prescribed or over the counter medications or natural health products you are taking in case there are interactions with clozapine.
- Tell your doctor or pharmacist how much caffeine you drink and whether or not you smoke, as any sudden changes in these habits may alter the effects of clozapine.
- Try to avoid alcohol. Alcohol may increase the drowsy effects of clozapine.
- Avoid drinking grapefruit juice while taking clozapine.

What about pregnancy or breastfeeding?

- Clozapine should only be taken during pregnancy if your doctor specifically prescribes it. Therefore, consult your doctor if you are, or intend to become pregnant. As clozapine passes into breastmilk, mothers taking clozapine should not breastfeed.

The information provided in this document is for educational purposes. It does not replace specific advice from your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. For more detailed information, consult the product monograph.

Created May 2025; adapted from:

HLS Therapeutics Inc. (January, 2020). Handbook for Clozaril Patients.

Humber River Health Mental Health and Addictions Program. (2016). Clozapine: What You Should Know.

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What should I do if I plan to move or go on vacation while taking clozapine?

- If you are planning to move or go on vacation, tell your doctor as soon as possible, at least 2 to 3 weeks before you depart so they can arrange for you to continue getting your medication and blood tests wherever you go.

Blood Monitoring:

Regular blood testing must be conducted as long as you are taking clozapine.

- Your body needs white blood cells to fight infections. Clozapine can make your white blood cell count go down, especially during the first 6 months of treatment. When your body doesn't make enough white blood cells, you can get a serious condition called *agranulocytosis*. This condition can be prevented or reversed in most cases if detected early enough.
 - **Pharmacists can only dispense clozapine if your blood testing is up to date. Make sure your blood tests are done regularly to ensure your clozapine treatment is safely monitored.**
- **First 6 months:** blood tests required every week
 - **Next 6 months:** blood tests required every 2 weeks
 - **After 1 year:** blood tests required every 4 weeks

Clozapine Monitoring Program

- Each manufacturer of clozapine has set up a monitoring program to help optimize communication between your doctor, the laboratory and your pharmacist to help ensure you get appropriate care. They also help facilitate your regular blood testing to ensure any problems are detected early on when they may be treatable and reversed.
- Your doctor needs your consent to share your information with the monitoring programs. Each brand of clozapine has its own monitoring program, and they need to be able to check with each other to make sure you have never experienced a drop in your white blood cell count while on another brand of clozapine.
- Information such as your initials, your date of birth and your gender are shared with the clozapine monitoring programs to make sure your blood test results are not mixed up with those of another patient on the same medication. Using this information means your name doesn't need to be shared to better protect your privacy.
- Your information will not be used for any other purposes than to ensure you are properly monitored while taking any brand of clozapine.

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Possible Side Effects of Clozapine

*This is not a complete list of all possible side effects. For a complete list of side effects, consult the product monograph.

Warnings and Precautions:

- Studies with various medications in the group to which clozapine belongs have shown an association with an increased risk of death when used in elderly patients with dementia. Clozapine is not indicated in elderly patients with dementia.
- Clozapine may cause a potentially life-threatening decrease in your white blood cell count (agranulocytosis) and should not be used if you have a history of bone marrow disorders. While you are taking clozapine, you will undergo regular blood-testing to monitor your white blood cell count. For this reason, your doctor will also enroll you in a clozapine monitoring program.
- Clozapine has been associated with potentially serious heart problems (e.g. myocarditis, pericarditis, pericardial effusion, or cardiomyopathy) and should not be used if you have a history of heart disease.

Talk to a member of your healthcare team right away if you experience:

- Signs of an infection such as cold or flu-like symptoms, fever, chills, sore throat or mouth ulcers (sign of low white blood cells)
- Abnormal heart rhythm or persistent rapid heart rate
- Shortness of breath or swelling of the feet
- Muscle spasms, stiffness or weakness
- Fainting or seizures
- Allergic rash or itchiness

Do not stop taking your clozapine without talking to your doctor.

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Management of Common Side Effects

Here are some tips to help you manage common side effects you might have with clozapine. Speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you experience these or any other side effects.

Do not stop taking or adjust your medication without talking to your doctor.

Side Effect	What You Can Do
Constipation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Eat a high-fibre diet, including more fruits, vegetables, whole-grain cereal, and bran ▪ Drink plenty of fluids ▪ Stay physically active ▪ Be careful if you take other medications that can cause constipation ▪ If you experience constipation, speak to your doctor or pharmacist
Drowsiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do not drive a car or operate machinery if you feel drowsy ▪ Your doctor may decide to divide your daily dose and have you take the larger portion at bedtime ▪ Drowsiness is worse when first starting clozapine and usually improves with time
Dizziness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clozapine can lower your blood pressure, especially at the start of treatment, causing dizziness or fainting ▪ Rise slowly from sitting or lying positions ▪ Drink plenty of fluids
Bed wetting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Avoid fluids before bedtime
Excessive salivation or drooling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ At night, place a soft towel over your pillow ▪ During the day, chew sugar-free gum
Weight gain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Speak to your doctor ▪ Talk to a dietician about your eating habits ▪ Try to eat healthy food and avoid junk food ▪ Add more exercise into your routine, like walking or taking a bike ride in your neighbourhood

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