Lamotrigine for epilepsy (Lamictal)

Lamotrigine is prescribed to treat two different conditions - epilepsy and bipolar disorder. Take your doses regularly. Do not stop taking lamotrigine unless your doctor tells you to. You can take your doses either before or after food.

About lamotrigine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of medicine</th>
<th>An antiepileptic medicine</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Used for</td>
<td>Epilepsy, bipolar disorder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Also called</td>
<td>Lamictal®</td>
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<tr>
<td>Available as</td>
<td>Tablets and dispersible tablets</td>
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Having epilepsy means that you have had more than one unexplained fit, or seizure. A seizure is a short episode of symptoms caused by a burst of abnormal electrical activity in your brain. Different parts of the brain control different functions of your body, so the symptoms that occur during a seizure will depend on where the abnormal burst of electrical activity occurs. Symptoms that may occur during a seizure can affect your muscles, sensations, behaviour, emotions, consciousness, or a combination of these. The seizures can be prevented in most people by suitable antiepileptic medication. Lamotrigine is a commonly used medicine. It works by stabilising the electrical activity of your brain, which helps to prevent the seizures from occurring.

Lamotrigine is also prescribed as a treatment for bipolar disorder, which is a condition where there can be extreme mood swings. It is helpful in preventing the periods of depression that occur in people with this disorder.

Before taking lamotrigine

Some medicines are not suitable for people with certain conditions, and sometimes a medicine may only be used if extra care is taken. For these reasons, before you start taking lamotrigine it is important that your doctor knows:

- If you are pregnant, trying for a baby or breastfeeding.
- If you have any problems with the way your kidneys work, or with the way your liver works.
- If you have Parkinson's disease.
- If you are taking any other medicines. This includes any medicines you are taking which are available to buy without a prescription, as well as herbal and complementary medicines.
- If you have ever had an allergic reaction to a medicine.

How to take lamotrigine

- Before you start the treatment, read the manufacturer's printed information leaflet from inside the pack. It will give you more information about lamotrigine and will provide you with a full list of the side-effects which you may experience from taking it.
- Take lamotrigine exactly as your doctor tells you to. Your dose will be printed on the label of the pack to remind you about what the doctor said. It is usual to start treatment on a low dose, and then for the dose to be increased gradually to a regular maintenance dose. It is usual to take either one or two doses every day. Doses for children are tailored to their age and weight.
- Try to take your doses at the same times of day, each day. Having a routine will help you to remember to take your doses regularly. You can take lamotrigine either before or after meals.
- Swallow the tablet with a drink of water. If you have been supplied with lamotrigine dispersible/chewable tablets, you can stir the tablet into a little water to help you swallow, or you can chew the tablet before swallowing it.
- If you forget to take a dose, take it as soon as you remember, unless it is nearly time for your next dose, in which case leave out the missed dose. Do not take two doses together to make up for a forgotten dose.
Getting the most from your treatment

- When you first start a new treatment for epilepsy there may be a change in the number or type of seizures you experience. Your doctor will advise you about this.
- Try to keep your regular appointments with your doctor. This is so your doctor can check on your progress.
- Different formulations and makes of lamotrigine can act in a slightly different way in your body. Because of this, your doctor may recommend that you continue to take lamotrigine from the same manufacturer each time you obtain a new supply. If so, each time you collect a prescription, check to make sure your supply looks the same and that the name is the same. If you are unsure, or if you have any questions about your prescription, please ask your pharmacist to advise you.
- If you buy any medicines, check with a pharmacist that they are suitable for you to take.
- While you are being treated for epilepsy there is a small risk that you may develop mood changes, distressing thoughts and feelings about suicide. If this happens, you must tell your doctor about it straightaway.
- People with epilepsy must stop driving at first. Your doctor will advise you about when it may be possible for you to start driving again. This will usually be after a year free of seizures.
- Antiepileptic medicines can harm an unborn child. If you are a woman, make sure you have discussed with your doctor which types of contraception are suitable for you and your partner. If you want to have a family, discuss this with your doctor so that you can be given advice from a specialist before you become pregnant.
- You need to take lamotrigine regularly every day. Do not stop taking it unless your doctor tells you to stop. Stopping treatment suddenly can cause problems and your doctor will probably want you to reduce your dose gradually if this becomes necessary.
- If you drink alcohol, ask your doctor for advice. Your doctor may advise you not to drink alcohol while you are on this medicine.

Can lamotrigine cause problems?

Along with their useful effects, most medicines can cause unwanted side-effects although not everyone experiences them. The table below contains some of the most common ones associated with lamotrigine. You will find a full list in the manufacturer’s information leaflet supplied with your medicine. The unwanted effects often improve as your body adjusts to the new medicine, but speak with your doctor or pharmacist if any of the following continue or become troublesome.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very common lamotrigine side-effects (these affect more than 1 in 10 people)</th>
<th>What can I do if I experience this?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skin rash</td>
<td>You should let your doctor know about this as soon as possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headache</td>
<td>Drink plenty of water and ask your pharmacist to recommend a suitable painkiller. If the headaches continue, let your doctor know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common lamotrigine side-effects (these affect less than 1 in 10 people)</th>
<th>What can I do if I experience this?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Back or joint aches and pains</td>
<td>Ask your pharmacist to recommend a suitable painkiller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling sick (nausea) or being sick (vomiting), diarrhoea</td>
<td>Stick to simple meals - avoid rich and spicy food. Drink plenty of water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling dizzy, tired or sleepy</td>
<td>Do not drive and do not use tools or machines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry mouth</td>
<td>Try chewing sugar-free gum or sucking sugar-free sweets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling agitated or irritable, difficulties sleeping, feeling unsteady or shaky</td>
<td>If any of these become troublesome, speak with your doctor for advice</td>
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</table>

**Important:** your doctor will discuss with you the possibility that lamotrigine can cause blood disorders and allergic skin reactions. Although these occur much less commonly than the side-effects listed above, it is important that you contact your doctor straightaway if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- A high temperature or swollen glands.
- Extreme tiredness.
- Unexplained bruising or bleeding.
- A severe skin rash.

If you experience any other symptoms which you think may be due to lamotrigine, speak with your doctor or pharmacist for further advice.
How to store lamotrigine

- Keep all medicines out of the reach and sight of children.
- Store in a cool, dry place, away from direct heat and light.

Important information about all medicines

Never take more than the prescribed dose. If you suspect that you or someone else might have taken an overdose of this medicine, go to the accident and emergency department of your local hospital. Take the container with you, even if it is empty.

This medicine is for you. Never give it to other people even if their condition appears to be the same as yours.

If you are having an operation or dental treatment, tell the person carrying out the treatment which medicines you are taking.

Do not keep out-of-date or unwanted medicines. Take them to your local pharmacy which will dispose of them for you.

If you have any questions about this medicine ask your pharmacist.

Further reading & references


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