

Information on the Use of Mirtazapine in Young People

What is Mirtazapine and how does it work?

Mirtazapine (sometimes also known as Zispin[®]) is a medication that belongs to a group of drugs called antidepressants. Antidepressants are used to help people with depression. Antidepressants work by increasing particular chemicals in parts of the brain that affect your mood. These chemicals include dopamine, noradrenaline and serotonin. Different antidepressants work on different combinations of chemicals. Mirtazapine increases dopamine, noradrenaline and serotonin.

When is it prescribed?

Like many medications used for young people, there is only limited data on mirtazapine in children and adolescents, and its use is not licensed in patients less than 18 years of age. Even so, antidepressants are used commonly for depression in young people. Mirtazapine may be used where the benefits of treatment outweigh any potential risks (for example side-effects).

How effective is it?

Most of the data on how well it works is based on use in adults. For adults, mirtazapine works as well as other antidepressants, and possibly better for those with a lot of sleep problems. Studies in children and adolescents are limited; however mirtazapine was shown to work and be well tolerated (not many side effects) in children and adolescents in a study done in 2004.

How should it be taken?

Mirtazapine is available as a standard tablet and a dispersible tablet (one that dissolves in the mouth). Mirtazapine is usually started at a low dose and increased gradually over several days or weeks based on response. It is usually taken once a day (normally at night).

How long does it take to work?

Mirtazapine, like the other antidepressants, usually takes between two to four weeks to begin to work, with some people feeling some benefit after one week. It can however take up to eight weeks before you see the full effect of the medication.

Since these medications take time to work, do not increase, decrease or stop them without discussing it with the doctor first.

How long should it be continued?

This can vary, but most people need to take this medication for at least six months after it has worked and they are feeling better. This allows time for the antidepressant to properly treat the depression and help prevent it returning. There is evidence in adults that stopping antidepressants too soon increases the risk of depression returning. After this time, you should discuss the benefits of continuing your treatment with the doctor.

Do not stop mirtazapine once feeling better without talking to the doctor first.

Is mirtazapine addictive?

No, mirtazapine is not addictive. Patient's who take mirtazapine do not "crave" it, as some people crave nicotine for example. Mirtazapine may cause mild "discontinuation symptoms" if stopped suddenly. You should inform the doctor if planning to stop, as it may need to be reduced gradually to prevent such symptoms.

What are the side effects?

Like all medicines, antidepressants have side effects. Most of them tend to wear off as the body gets used to the medicine.

➤ Common side effects:

Side-effect	What can be done?
Drowsiness & Tiredness	This will get better over time. Take the dose at bedtime. Inform the doctor if drowsiness during the day continues to be a problem as adjusting the dose may improve this.
Dizziness	This too wears off over time. Sitting and standing up slowly can help as this is when it is most likely to occur.
Increased appetite	Monitor diet. Reduce high calorie and sugar intake. Increase exercise.

If any of these side effects are troublesome, please discuss them with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

➤ Uncommon side effects:

Contact the doctor immediately if any of the following side effects develop:

- Skin rash.
- Restlessness or agitation, or thoughts of self harm, hostility or suicide.
- Fever, sore throat, soreness of mouth or other signs of infection.

What should I do if I forget to take (give) a dose?

If a dose of mirtazapine is forgotten, do not worry, omit the dose and continue as normal the following day. **Do not** double the next dose.

What are the alternatives?

There are several other antidepressants that can be useful for young people, including fluoxetine (Prozac[®]), sertraline (Lustral[®]), citalopram (Cipramil[®]) and escitalopram (Cipralext[®]). Other antidepressants, such as paroxetine (Seroxat[®]) have been found unhelpful for many young people. All of these antidepressants work on a chemical in the brain called serotonin.

Psychological (talking) therapies can also be very effective in the treatment of depression. Combining an antidepressant and psychological therapy is often most helpful.

Further information

Ask your doctor about anything that you do not understand in this leaflet. Further detailed information on mirtazapine is available on the internet:

<http://www.choiceandmedication.org/sussex/medication/mirtazapine/>

<http://www.emc.medicines.org.uk/>

Any information you find on the Internet is likely to relate to adults over the age of eighteen. Some Internet sites may not provide reliable information.

If you require this leaflet in an alternative format, ie easy read, large text, audio, Braille or a community language please contact the Pharmacy Team on 01243 623349 (Text Relay calls welcome)

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