



# Clozapine

(Pronounced cloz-a-peen)

## Why has clozapine been prescribed?

Clozapine is an antipsychotic used to treat schizophrenia and other similar conditions. Antipsychotics are effective in reducing the symptoms of psychosis. They also shorten the time to recovery and help prevent relapses. It is used in low doses for psychosis in Parkinson's disease.

## What are the benefits of taking clozapine?

Clozapine is used when other antipsychotics have not been effective. Clozapine is the only antipsychotic effective in treatment-resistant schizophrenia.

## Why are regular blood tests needed?

Before you start clozapine, your prescriber will carry out a physical examination that will include taking a blood sample. This is because, rarely, clozapine can lower the number of white blood cells in your blood. White cells fight infection. If you have too few white cells, it will be harder for your body to fight off infection. Only 3 people in every 100 have this side effect. It is not related to the dose you take. To make sure clozapine is safe to take your blood will be tested every week. After 18 weeks, you should need a blood test only every fortnight. After 12 months you may only need a monthly blood test.

## Are there any risks with clozapine?

It is usually safe to have clozapine regularly as prescribed by your prescriber. As with all medicines, there are precautions. Let your prescriber know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care may be needed:

- If you have epilepsy, glaucoma, diabetes or suffer from liver, heart, kidney, prostate trouble or severe constipation or bowel obstruction
- If you are taking any other medication, especially antidepressants, lithium, anticonvulsants, cimetidine, antibiotics or medication for anxiety or insomnia. Also, tell your prescriber if you get any medicine from your pharmacist. Please tell your prescriber if you take any alternative or complementary medicine such as Chinese herbal medicines. If you smoke heavily this can affect the way your body metabolises (processes) clozapine.
- If you are pregnant, breast feeding, or wish to become pregnant.
- If you have an intolerance to lactose as this is an ingredient of clozapine tablets and most of the liquids (except Denzapine brand liquid).

## What is the usual dose of clozapine?

The starting dose is usually 12.5mg a day. This is increased slowly over a few weeks. The usual dose of clozapine can be anything between 150mg and 900mg a day. Your prescriber will probably check the level of clozapine in your body when you are on a stable dose.

## How should clozapine be taken?

Clozapine can be taken once, twice or three times a day. Your dose schedule will be carefully chosen for you.

## What form does clozapine come in?

Clozapine is available as tablets. The tablets come as 25mg and 100mg. It is also available in liquid as 50mg in 1ml in the Denzapine brand. Some hospitals make their own clozapine liquid.

## What should be done if a dose is missed?

If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember, as long as it is within a few hours of the usual time. If you miss a whole day's dose – just carry on as normal with the usual dose the following day. If you miss more than a day's dose, speak to your prescriber.

## What will happen when Clozapine is first taken?

Clozapine, like many medicines, does not work straight away. For example, it may take several days or even weeks for some symptoms to lessen. To begin with, most people find that clozapine will help them feel more relaxed and calm. Later, (usually in two or three weeks) other symptoms should begin to improve. Many people do not experience any side effects. However some people may experience some side effects. We have listed potential side effects in the table below, whether or not they are likely to be short or long-term and what measures can be taken is also described. There are other possible side effects – we have listed only the most common ones. Ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if you are worried about anything that you think might be a side effect. Further information on side effects is available in the official manufacturer's leaflet.

## Reporting side effects

The 'Yellow Card' scheme encourages patients to report any side effects that they feel may be caused by their medication. Ask your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse for the forms if you wish to report any side effects. Alternatively, telephone 0800 100 3352 or go to [www.mhra.gov.uk](http://www.mhra.gov.uk).

## Is clozapine addictive?

No, clozapine is not addictive. However, if you stop taking clozapine suddenly you may experience unpleasant physical feelings.

## What about alcohol?

It is recommended that people taking clozapine should not drink alcohol. This is because both antipsychotics and alcohol can cause drowsiness. If the two are taken together, severe drowsiness can result. This can lead to falls and accidents. Drinking alcohol may also make psychosis worse. However, once people are used to taking medication then very small amounts of alcohol may not be harmful. It pays to be very careful because alcohol affects people in different ways, especially when they are taking medication. Never drink alcohol and drive. Discuss any concerns you may have with your doctor, pharmacist or nurse.

## Is it OK to stop taking clozapine when symptoms go away?

No. If you stop taking clozapine, your original symptoms will return. Most people need to be on clozapine for quite a long time, sometimes years. You should always discuss any plans you have to reduce or stop any of your prescribed medicines with your prescriber.

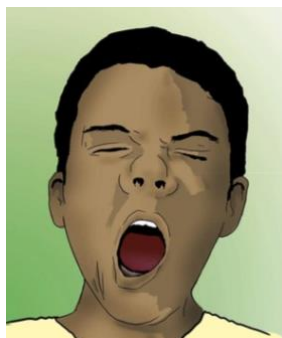
## Are there any alternatives to clozapine?

No. Only clozapine is effective in treatment resistant schizophrenia.

## Further information – cigarette smoking

People who smoke cigarettes may increase the breakdown of clozapine in the body. This may be important if you are a heavy smoker and then suddenly reduce or even stop smoking completely. Before reducing or stopping smoking, be sure to speak to your prescriber first.

## Summary of side effects



### **Drowsiness - Very common**

#### **What can be done about it?**

Drowsiness tends to wear off over time. Speak to your prescriber about changing the dose or dose timings.



### **Constipation – Very common**

#### **What can be done about it?**

Eat lots of fibre – fruit and vegetables are a good source. Most people need to take laxatives. Your prescriber should prescribe these.



### **Excessive salivation - Common (drooling)**

#### **What can be done about it?**

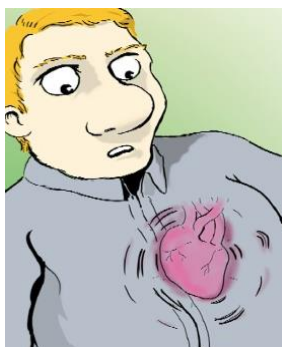
Your prescriber may prescribe another medicine to treat this side effect. This tends to wear off in time.



### **Low blood pressure - Common**

#### **What can be done about it?**

This can be troublesome when standing-up. You may feel dizzy or faint. This tends to occur at the beginning of treatment and usually wears off after a few weeks.



### **Tachycardia – Common (palpitations)**

#### **What can be done about it?**

Many people have a fast heartbeat. This is most common in the first few weeks of treatment. See your prescriber if you experience palpitations.



### Weight gain – Common

#### What can be done about it?

Clozapine makes people feel hungry and eat more. Try to eat healthily and take exercise.



### Heartburn - Common

#### What can be done about it?

Tell your prescriber, you may need to take antacids.

Other (less common) side effects	How common is it and what can be done about it?
Diabetes	<b>Uncommon</b> Your prescriber should test you regularly for diabetes. Other medicines may need to be prescribed.
High blood pressure	<b>Uncommon</b> Sometimes occurs at the start of treatment. Other medicines are sometimes needed to reduce blood pressure.
Reduced white blood cells (neutropenia)	<b>Rare</b> Your blood will be tested as described above.
Seizures	<b>Rare</b> May occur in people on higher doses. Sometimes, anticonvulsants are prescribed.
Inflammation of the heart (myocarditis)	<b>Very rare</b> Blood test will be done to check everything is ok. Tell your prescriber if you feel feverish and breathless.

Very common = almost everyone affected  
Common = many people affected  
Uncommon = some people affected

Rare = few people affected  
Very rare = very few or no one affected

## Disclaimer

This leaflet does not replace the official manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet.

For more information, visit [www.slam.nhs.uk/meds](http://www.slam.nhs.uk/meds) or speak to a health care professional.

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