



# Venlafaxine

(Pronounced ven-la-fax-een)

## Why has venlafaxine been prescribed?

Venlafaxine is an antidepressant prescribed to treat depression and other mood disorders such as anxiety.

## What are the benefits of taking venlafaxine?

Anti-depressants are effective in reducing the severity of the symptoms of depression. They also shorten the time to recovery and prevent depression returning.

## Are there any precautions with venlafaxine?

Venlafaxine is suitable for most people. As with all medicines, however, there are precautions. Your prescriber will usually check that it is safe to prescribe venlafaxine, but let your prescriber know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care may be needed:

- If you have epilepsy, glaucoma, diabetes, a history of stomach ulcers or suffer from high blood pressure, heart failure or heart rhythm problems, liver or kidney trouble.
- If you are taking any other medication, especially for schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, antidepressants, the antibiotic linezolid and anticoagulants such as warfarin. Also, tell your prescriber if you buy any medicine 'over the counter' from a pharmacy or supermarket. Please also tell your prescriber if you take any alternative or complementary medicine such as Chinese herbal medicines. St John's Wort should not be taken by patients prescribed venlafaxine.
- If you are pregnant, breast feeding, or wish to become pregnant.
- If you have an intolerance to lactose as this is an ingredient in venlafaxine tablets (but not in the slow release capsules).

## What is the usual dose of venlafaxine?

The starting dose is usually 37.5mg twice a day. This may sometimes be increased after several weeks. The usual dose of venlafaxine may be between 75mg and 150mg depending on the condition for which it has been prescribed. The maximum dose of venlafaxine tablets is 375mg a day.

## How should venlafaxine be taken?

Venlafaxine is usually taken twice a day if taking tablets and once a day if taking capsules. However, you and your prescriber may decide that it is better for you to take the medicine at another time.

## What form does venlafaxine come in?

Venlafaxine is available as standard release tablets, slow release capsules and slow release tablets. The standard release tablets are available as 37.5mg and 75mg, the slow release capsules are available as 75mg and 150mg strengths and the slow release tablets as 37.5mg, 75mg, 150mg and 225mg.

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

If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If you miss a whole day's dose – just carry on as normal with the next due dose. If you miss more than a day's dose, speak to your prescriber.

## What will happen when venlafaxine is first taken?

Venlafaxine, like many medicines, does not work straight away. For example, it may take several days or even weeks for some symptoms to improve. To begin with, some people find that venlafaxine may help them feel more alert and less slowed down. Later, (usually in two to 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 important ones. Ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if you are worried about anything else 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 venlafaxine addictive?

Venlafaxine is not addictive, but if you stop taking the medicine suddenly, you may experience unpleasant physical feelings. Symptoms are fairly common and include nausea, insomnia, electric shock sensations, anxiety, dizziness and vivid dreams. Reducing the dose of venlafaxine slowly may make these symptoms less severe.

## What about alcohol?

It is recommended that people taking venlafaxine should not drink alcohol. This is because both antidepressants and alcohol can cause drowsiness. If the two are taken together, severe drowsiness can result. This can lead to falls and accidents. As well as this, drinking alcohol may make depression and anxiety 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 venlafaxine when symptoms go away?

No. If you stop taking venlafaxine your original symptoms are very likely to return. Most people need to remain on venlafaxine for at least six months after they have fully recovered. You should always discuss with your prescriber any plans you have to reduce or stop any of your prescribed medicines.

## Are there any alternatives to venlafaxine?

Yes, there are alternatives available. Although antidepressants have broadly similar therapeutic effects they differ in the side effects they produce. There are more than 20 antidepressants available so most people can find one which suits them. Psychological therapies can also help in some types of depression, either as an alternative to medication or alongside it.

## Summary of side effects



**Nausea – Very Common** (sometimes with vomiting)

**What can be done about it?**

This should wear off within a few days. Taking the medication with food may help. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.



**Dry mouth – Common**

**What can be done about it?**

This should wear off within a few days. Sugar-free boiled sweets, chewing gum or eating citrus fruits may help. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.



**Anxiety or restlessness – Common** (feeling worried and agitated)

**What can be done about it?**

This should wear off within a few days. Report to your prescriber if this persists.



**Insomnia or disturbed sleep – Common**

**What can be done about it?**

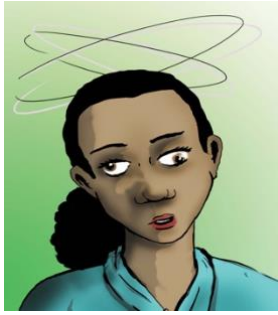
This should wear off within a few days. Venlafaxine should be taken in the morning. Discuss with your prescriber if it persists.



**Headache - Common**

**What can be done about it?**

This should wear off within a few days. Paracetamol can be taken but discuss with your prescriber if this persists.



**Dizziness - Common**

**What can be done about it?**

This may wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.



**Sweating - Common**

**What can be done about it?**

Discuss this with your prescriber if it becomes troublesome.



**Sexual dysfunction – Common (reduced libido (desire) and lack of orgasm in males and females. Impotence in males)**

**What can be done about it?**

Any changes should be reported to your prescriber. It may be necessary to switch to another medication. Symptoms should go away when switched to another medication.

Other (less common) side effects	How common is it and what can be done about it?
Hypertension (increased blood pressure)	<b>Uncommon</b> Your prescriber will monitor your blood pressure while you are taking venlafaxine.
Diarrhoea – loose stools	<b>Uncommon</b> This should wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.
Loss of appetite	<b>Uncommon</b> This should wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.
Drowsiness	<b>Uncommon</b> This should wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists. Taking the medication at a different time may help.
Tachycardia (palpitations)	<b>Rare</b> Contact your prescriber if you experience palpitations.

Very common = almost everyone affected

Rare = few people affected

Common = many people affected  
Uncommon = some 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.

**Leaflet supplied by:** Medicines Information, Pharmacy Department, Maudsley Hospital,  
London SE5 8AZ | Telephone: 020 3228 2317

**Artwork by:** Oscar Millar ([www.millarstratton.co.uk](http://www.millarstratton.co.uk))