

Serotonin and Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors (SNRIs)

What are SNRIs?

These medicines are a type of antidepressant. They are most commonly used to treat depression and anxiety.

They can also be used to treat other types of illnesses, like obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and chronic pain).

You are taking:

- Desvenlafaxine (say *dez-ven-la-fax-seen*)
- Duloxetine (say *do-locks-uh-teen*)
- Venlafaxine (say *ven-la-fax-seen*)
- Levomilnacipran (say *lee-voe-mill-na-sip-ran*)

You are taking this medicine for:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Other: _____

How do SNRIs work?

Depression and anxiety can happen when the chemicals in your brain such as serotonin (say *sara-toe-nin*) and norepinephrine (say *nor-ep-in-nef-rin*) are out-of-balance.

SNRIs work by restoring the balance of serotonin and norepinephrine in the brain. This can:

- help improve your energy and mood
- help improve your interest in activities
- help your appetite
- help you sleep better
- help you feel calmer
- help you concentrate better
- help you have less harmful thoughts

How quickly will it start working?

Some of your symptoms might get better before others.

- It can take 1 to 2 weeks to feel like you have more energy, are sleeping better, and have a better appetite.
- It can take 4 to 8 weeks for you to feel less depressed. It can take several weeks more for you to experience less anxiety, pain, or symptoms of OCD or PTSD.

How do I take SNRIs?

- Take your SNRI regularly as prescribed.
- You can take it with or without food but taking it with food might help reduce upset stomach. Swallow the capsule whole with a glass of water. Do not crush or chew.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as possible.
- If it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and return to your regular schedule. Do not take 2 doses at the same time.

Why is it important to keep taking it?

- Always take the amount you are supposed to take (the dose written on the prescription label). Do not change how much you take. Do not stop taking it without talking to your doctor.
- If you do not take it as prescribed, the amount of medicine in your body can get too low, making it not work as well and increase the chance of side effects.
- If you suddenly stop taking an SNRI, you could experience unwanted effects such as not being able to sleep, headaches, feeling sick to your stomach (nausea), prickly or tingly feelings on your skin, and feeling like you have the flu.

What should I look out for?

Here are some possible side effects and what to do if you notice them.

Common Side Effects



a) **Constipation or diarrhea**

Drink plenty of fluids. Water is best.

If you are constipated, add fibre to your meals by eating foods such as bran, vegetables, and fruit.



b) **Dizziness**

Take your time getting up from a sitting or lying position. Drink plenty of fluids. Water is best. Limit how much alcohol you drink.



c) **Drowsiness**

If you are drowsy during the day, take this medicine at bedtime. It is dangerous to drive or use machinery when drowsy.



d) **Feeling nervous or agitated**

If you feel nervous or agitated, take your medicine in the morning. Drink less coffee. This side effect should improve after 1 to 2 weeks.



e) **Feeling sick to the stomach (nausea)**

Eat small meals more often during the day. Take your medicine with food. Drink water.



f) **Headache**

This should improve over time. Tell your doctor and/or pharmacist if this keeps bothering you.



g) **Increased blood pressure**

Tell your doctor if you are taking medicines for high blood pressure. Your doctor might want you to check your blood pressure regularly.



h) **Less interest in sex**

Talk to your doctor and/or pharmacist about how this problem can be addressed.



i) **Sweating**

Talk to your doctor and/or pharmacist. Showering more and using deodorant might help.



j) **Trouble sleeping**

If you experience trouble sleeping, you can take your medicine in the morning. Drink less coffee. Be active and exercise during the day.

Rare but Serious Side Effects

a) **Serotonin syndrome**

- This happens when there is too much serotonin in your body. It can happen when an SNRI is taken with some other medicines or natural health products.
- Early symptoms include feeling confused, feeling agitated, muscle twitching, sweating, shivering, and/or diarrhea.
- Serious symptoms include a very high fever, seizures, heart skipping beats, and/or blacking out.

b) **Low sodium**

- SNRIs can lower the amount of salt) in your blood.
- Early symptoms of a low sodium blood level include feeling sick to your stomach (nausea), headache, feeling confused, feeling very tired all the time, and/or muscle spasms.
- Serious symptoms include throwing up (vomiting), a really bad headache, and/or muscle cramps. Rarely, it can cause seizures.

c) **Bleeding**

- SNRIs can increase your risk of bleeding. This risk can also increase when an SNRI is taken with certain other medicines, such as painkillers like ibuprofen (Advil) or naproxen (Aleve). Acetaminophen (Tylenol) does not have this risk. Watch for symptoms of bleeding inside your body.
- Early signs of bleeding include bright red or dark red blood in your stool and/or feeling very tired.
- Serious signs of bleeding include fainting, throwing up blood, a really bad headache, sudden blurred vision, and/or weakness to one side of the body.

When should I get help?

See your doctor as soon as possible if:

- Your symptoms of depression, anxiety, pain, OCD, or PTSD are getting worse or returning.
- You feel hopeless, or you feel that there is no way to solve the problem or end the pain.
- Any of the common side effects get worse or do not go away.
- You suddenly stop taking your SNRI.

Go to the nearest Emergency Department if:

- You feel like acting on thoughts of harming yourself and/or others.
- You notice early symptoms of any of the rare side effects.

Call 9-1-1 if:

- You have serious symptoms of any of the rare side effects.

What else should I know?

- Other medicines can change how SNRIs work. Always check with your doctor and/or pharmacist before taking any other medicines. This includes prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines (especially ibuprofen or naproxen), and herbal medicines (especially St. John's Wort).

It's good to ask questions

Anytime you have any questions or concerns about taking this medicine, talk with one of your healthcare team.

Call 8-1-1 (HealthLinkBC) after hours and for any other health advice.

HealthLinkBC is open 24 hours a day and available in 130 languages. For an interpreter, say your language in English. Wait until an interpreter comes on the phone.

This information does not replace the advice given to you by your healthcare provider.