

Lamotrigine

Lamotrigine is a mood stabilizer that can reduce depression and irritability. It has very powerful preventative benefits for long-term mental health: on average, people have half as many mood episodes while taking it.

Its main use is in preventing bipolar disorder and rapid cycling of mood episodes. Unlike other mood stabilizers, which work by treating episodes of mania, lamotrigine stabilizes mood by lifting the depressed phase. For this reason, it does not make people feel flat or drowsy as other mood stabilizers can. People who take lamotrigine usually feel like themselves, but feel they can handle stress better and have more days of good mood.

Outside of its use in bipolar disorder, lamotrigine has smaller studies suggesting benefits in cyclothymia, OCD, borderline personality disorder, irritability, post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia, and depersonalization.

How to take it

- Lamotrigine needs to be stopped if you have any rash during the first three months of starting it. To prevent false alarms, avoid the following while starting it: Sunburn, new skin products or new soaps/detergents, poison ivy.
- If miss more than a week of lamotrigine, do not restart at your old dose (this can cause a serious rash). Call us to restart at a lower dose.
- It is usually best to take it in the morning (it can help with energy and may disrupt sleep), but you may take it at night if you prefer.
- If it is hard to swallow or upsets your stomach... take with food or thick liquid; crush the tablets. Consider changing to the a chewable or dissolvable form (these may cost more).
- If you miss a dose... ask yourself if you are closer to the dose you missed – if so, take it and continue on your regular schedule. If you are closer to the next scheduled dose, wait and take that one. Do not double-up on doses.

Key Points

1. Stop lamotrigine and call provider if you get any kind of rash within the first 3 months of starting it.
2. If you run out of lamotrigine for more than a week, do not restart; call us to determine a safe starting dose.

How long should I take it for?

Lamotrigine is generally used for mental health problems that are caused in part by genetics and tend to recur throughout life. There is a high risk of the original problem returning if lamotrigine is stopped. Lamotrigine does not have a withdrawal syndrome, but is safer to lower slowly if you plan to come off it. You may read that stopping lamotrigine can cause seizures; this warning only applies to people who take it for seizures.

How it works

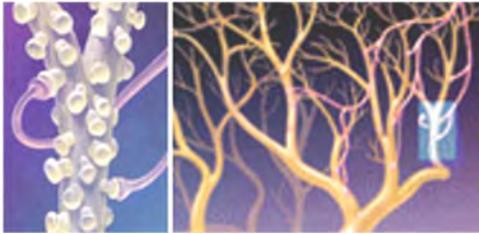
Lamotrigine reduces chemicals which have toxic effects on brain cells (e.g. glutamate) and enhances the growth of brain cells (see picture on back).

Common side effects

Lamotrigine is usually well tolerated and does not cause weight gain. Side effects are more common at higher doses and can include dizziness, headache, vivid dreams, impaired coordination, stomach cramps and nausea. It can make you more sensitive to sunburn. Although lamotrigine helps concentration in bipolar disorder, it can cause word-finding difficulty at higher doses. Generally, these side effects are temporary and improve with time.



Before treatment: the effects of depression and stress have caused this nerve cell to shrink back like a tree with few branches.



After treatment: lamotrigine has strengthened the roots and connections of the brain cell. The result is better communication within the brain and better stress management.

Preventing sunburn on lamotrigine

Sunburn is important to prevent because of its association with skin cancer. On sunny days, use a *broad spectrum* sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30 (good affordable brands are Target's Up&Up and No-Ad). Put on 15-30 minutes before going out in the sun; reapply ever 1-3 hours. Protective clothing (e.g. Solumbra brand), sunglasses (look for at least UV 400 protection), broad-rimmed (at least 4-inches) hats and shade can help.

Serious side effects

Lamotrigine can rarely cause a severe, life-threatening rash (Stevens Johnson Syndrome) while starting it. The risk of this allergic reaction is 1 in 5,000-10,000 people. Lamotrigine needs to be raised slowly to prevent this rash. Children are more at risk for the rash, so lamotrigine is raised twice as slowly in those younger than 18.

Call your provider and stop lamotrigine if you have any rash or skin changes within the first three months of starting lamotrigine or raising the dose. Also check your temperature.

Drug Interactions

Birth control medicines can lower lamotrigine levels by 30-50% (lamotrigine will not interfere with birth control). Lamotrigine can interact with a few other drugs, especially seizure medicines; make sure your doctor knows you are taking those.

How to store and dispose of medication

- Keep out of the reach of children.
- Store away from heat, direct light and damp places.
- To safely dispose of unwanted pills: Do not pour in the toilet or sink (it will enter the water supply). To prevent children or pets from eating it, mix unwanted pills in a bag with a little water and inedible trash (such as coffee grounds or kitty litter) and throw in the trash.

Quick facts

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| Brand name | Lamotrigine |
| Dose range | 50-200mg |
| Sizes | > Tabs: 25, 50, 100, 150, 200, 250mg tablets > Chewable tabs: 2, 5, 25mg > Orally disintegrating tabs: 25, 50, 100, 200mg (ODT, brand only) (also as extended release tabs which are used for seizures) |
| Release date | 12/27/1994 |
| FDA-approval | Bipolar disorder, epilepsy (seizures) |