

Using *Venlafaxine* in Children and Adolescents

This information explains how *Venlafaxine* can be used as part of a treatment plan with children and adolescents. You may wish to share this information with your family members to help them to understand your treatment options. Since every person's needs are different, it is important that you follow the advice provided to you by your own doctor, nurse and/or pharmacist and speak to them if you have any questions about this medication.



What is Venlafaxine used for?

Venlafaxine (Effexor XR[®]) belongs to a group of medications called antidepressants. Venlafaxine may be used to treat several conditions.

Like many medications used to treat childhood disorders, venlafaxine has not been approved by Health Canada for use in children and adolescents. When the benefits (e.g., reducing your symptoms) of using venlafaxine outweigh the potential risks (e.g., the side effects), many physicians may prescribe it to treat:

- Depression
- Depression associated with Bipolar Disorder
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Some Anxiety Disorders like Social Phobia

Your doctor may be using this medication for another reason. If you are unclear why venlafaxine is being prescribed, please ask your doctor.



How does Venlafaxine work?

Venlafaxine is a selective "Serotonin and Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitor". This means it increases the amount of certain chemicals in the brain called serotonin and norepinephrine. It is believed that these brain chemicals are not working well in people who are depressed. The exact way that venlafaxine improves the symptoms of depression is still not fully known.

How well does Venlafaxine work in children and adolescents?

Testing of venlafaxine in children and adolescent research studies has been limited. In some studies of children and adolescents with depression, medications like venlafaxine have been found to help about **5-6 people out of 10**. Venlafaxine has been studied in youth with depression as well as youth with anxiety disorders. Some of these trials have found that venlafaxine was not better at lowering the symptoms of depression than a placebo (an inactive pill that looks like medication).

In general, some depressed youth prescribed venlafaxine for 2-3 months, will notice an improvement in their depressive symptoms (*such as improved mood, better sleep, more energy, and improved concentration*). Whenever possible, the addition of talk therapy (*such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy – CBT*) to these medications increases the potential for benefits.

How should Venlafaxine be taken?

Venlafaxine is usually taken once a day with or without food. This medication should be taken at the same time each day as directed by your doctor. Try to connect it with something you do each day (like eating breakfast or brushing your teeth) so that you don't forget. Usually, your doctor will start with a low dose of venlafaxine. Then, this dose will be slowly increased based on how you/your child responds to it. You and your doctor can then

discuss the best dosage to stay on based on how this medication is tolerated and how well it helps decrease your symptoms.

When will this medication start working?

Venlafaxine must be taken for 3 to 6 weeks before you begin to feel better. Different symptoms start to improve at different rates. For example, improvements in sleep, appetite and energy may be seen within the first 2 weeks. Sometimes, others will notice improvements in you before you do. Full beneficial effects may take 4 to 8 weeks (or longer). **Since these medications take time to work, do not increase, decrease or stop them without discussing it with your doctor.**

If you are not feeling better within 6 to 8 weeks, your doctor may recommend you take a different antidepressant. There is also a small possibility that your depressive symptoms may worsen or that you may experience some thoughts of self harm during the first couple months of taking this medication (see section on side effects). If this happens, tell your doctor IMMEDIATELY.



How long do I have to take this medication?



This depends on the symptoms you have, how frequent they occur and how long you have had them. Most people need to take this medication for at least 6 months. This allows time for your symptoms to stabilize and for you to regain functioning. After this time, you and your doctor should discuss the benefits and risks to continuing treatment.

If you have had several episodes of severe depression and you tolerate this medication well, you may be asked to take this medication for an indefinite amount of time. By continuing to take this medication, you significantly decrease the chance that you may have another episode of depression. Do not stop taking this medication if you are feeling better without first discussing it with your doctor.

Once you have started taking this medication, your doctor and you will need to monitor for both the beneficial and unwanted effects. Your doctor will likely check your progress and discuss changes in symptoms during the next 3 months to confirm that the medication is working properly and that possible side effects are avoided.

Tip: Use the Antidepressant Monitoring Form to help measure your progress on this medication.

Is Venlafaxine addictive?

No, venlafaxine is not addictive. You will not have “cravings” for it like some people do with nicotine or street drugs. If you and your doctor decide to stop using venlafaxine, your doctor can explain how to safely lower the dose so you don’t feel any “flu-like” effects as your body adjusts to being without it.

What are the side effects of this medication and what should I do if I get them?

As with most medications, side effects may occur in those who take venlafaxine. Most side effects are considered to be mild and temporary. Side effects may occur before any of the beneficial effects. It is possible for some individuals to experience a side effect that they feel is serious or long lasting. If this occurs, speak to your doctor about ways to manage these side effects. Here are some of the more common side effects of taking this medication. In brackets are suggested ways to lessen these effects.

Common side effects

Should any of these side effects be too troublesome for you, please discuss them with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

- Energized/agitated feelings (*avoid caffeine, from colas and coffee*)
- Constipation (*increase exercise, fluids, fruits and fibre*)
- Difficulty sleeping (*try taking the medication earlier in the day*)

- Dizziness (*try getting up slowly from a sitting or lying down position*)
- Dry mouth (*try chewing sugarless gum, sour candies, ice chips, or popsicles*)
- Headache (*try using a pain reliever like acetaminophen*)
- Changes in sexual performance or drive (*discuss with your doctor*)
- Stomach ache, nausea (*try taking venlafaxine with food*)

Uncommon side effects (e.g., those that occur in less than 5% of patients)

Contact your doctor IMMEDIATELY if you have any of these side effects:

- An uncomfortable sense of inner restlessness or agitation
- Sweating
- Drowsiness
- Skin rash
- Slight increase in blood pressure
- Muscle twitches or stiffness
- Vivid dreams
- A switch in mood to an unusual state of excitement, irritability or happiness
- Thoughts of self harm, hostility or suicide.



What precautions should my doctor and I be aware of when taking this medication?

Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you:

Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you:

- have any changes in mood or thoughts of self harm.
- have any allergies or have had bad reactions to other medications.
- take any other prescription or non-prescription medications. Some medications may interact with venlafaxine. Your doctor may need to change the doses of your medication(s) or monitor you carefully for side effects if you are taking other medications.
- have a history of heart disease, seizures, kidney or liver disease.
- miss a period, become pregnant or are trying to become pregnant.

Do not stop taking this medication suddenly as this may result in a ‘discontinuation syndrome’.

Symptoms include chills, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, tingling in hands and feet, muscle aches and fever.

What should I do if I forget to take a dose?

If you miss a dose of this medication, take it as soon as possible. However, if it is almost time for your next dose (e.g., within 4 hours), do not take the missed dose or double your next dose. Instead, continue your regular dosing schedule.



What storage conditions are needed for this medication?

- Keep this medication in the original container, stored at room temperature away from moisture and heat (e.g., not in the bathroom).
- Keep this medication out of reach from children.