



Overview

Clomipramine (Anafranil® and generic forms) belongs to a group of medications called “antiobsessional” medications. It is approved by Health Canada for the treatment of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and depression in adults, adolescents and children age 10 and over. Clomipramine is also known as a “*tricyclic*” antidepressant (TCA”).

What is *clomipramine* used for?

In addition to obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and depression, clomipramine may also be used to treat the following conditions:

- Anxiety disorders and severe habits such as hair pulling (trichotillomania)
- Chronic pain disorders

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

How does *clomipramine* work?



Clomipramine works by affecting the activity of brain chemicals (neurotransmitters) called serotonin and norepinephrine. Clomipramine enhances the action of these chemicals in parts of the brain that control concentration, motivation and mood. This in turn improves the symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder and depression. The exact way that these medications improve the symptoms of OCD and depression is still not fully known.

How well does *clomipramine* work in children and adolescents?

When used to treat obsessive-compulsive disorder, clomipramine may reduce:

- *Obsessions*: recurrent, intrusive, inappropriate or unwelcomed thoughts and images, which cause great anxiety or distress and interferes with daily functioning
- *Compulsions*: repetitive behaviours (e.g., hand washing, checking, ordering) or mental acts (e.g., praying, counting, repeating words silently) done according to rigid rules, to reduce distress or prevent a feared event

Clomipramine has been shown in children and adolescents aged 10 to 17 to improve OCD symptoms by about one-third following 8 weeks of treatment. When effective, this medication helps with your ability to participate in daily activities, job or academic performance, and social activities or relationships which may have been impaired by OCD.

Even if you respond well to clomipramine therapy, you may find that OCD symptoms still persist to some extent. However, you may be better able to resist those obsessions or compulsions and spend less time engaging in obsessive-compulsive behaviours. Clomipramine may help you to have more control over your obsessive or compulsive thoughts and behaviours, as well as improving your overall functioning. This medication may also prevent symptoms from returning in the future. For treatment of OCD, depression and anxiety disorders, the addition of behavioural therapy such as *Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)* to this medication may help to increase the potential for benefits.



How should *clomipramine* be taken?

Clomipramine is available as tablets that are taken by mouth. When starting treatment for obsessive-compulsive disorder, your doctor may start with a low dose. Then, the dose may be gradually increased every 3 to 4 days for the first two weeks. Thereafter, the dose may be further increased gradually as needed for several weeks, based on your symptoms. Your doctor will determine how much you should take, based on your response to this medication.

At the start of treatment, you may need to take clomipramine several times a day. After your symptoms have stabilized, the doses may be combined into a single daily dose taken at bedtime. You can take this medication with or without food. If it upsets your stomach, take clomipramine after a meal or a light snack.

Clomipramine needs to be taken regularly on a daily basis in order to be effective (even if you feel well). Try connecting it with something you do at those time(s) (for example: brushing your teeth) to help you remember the dose(s).

Try to avoid drinking alcohol while taking clomipramine. Avoid eating grapefruit or drinking grapefruit juice while taking clomipramine. Grapefruit can affect how this medication works for you, and combined use may lead to excessive drowsiness or side effects.

When will *clomipramine* start working?

When used to treat OCD, clomipramine may need to be taken for 6 to 12 weeks before you notice an improvement in your symptoms. It may take 4 to 6 months to see the full effect of this medication. **Since this medication takes time to work, do not increase, decrease or stop it without discussing it with your doctor first.**

If you are not feeling better within 4 to 6 months, your doctor may recommend you take a different medication. There is a small chance that depression or anxiety symptoms may worsen or that you may experience increased thoughts of self harm during the first months of taking this medication (see section on side effects). If this happens, tell your doctor **IMMEDIATELY**.



How long do I have to take *clomipramine*?

This depends on the symptoms you have, how frequently they occur and how long you have had them. Some people may take it for several months, while others continue to benefit from this medication for a long period of time. By continuing to take this medication, you significantly decrease the chance of your OCD symptoms returning. From time to time, your doctor may assess your need for continued treatment.

Do NOT stop taking this medication (even if you are feeling better) without discussing it with your doctor first. If you stop taking this medication suddenly, it is possible that your symptoms may return or you may have a bad reaction.

Once you have started taking this medication, you and your doctor will need to monitor for both beneficial and unwanted effects. Your doctor will check your progress and discuss changes in symptoms during the next 3 to 6 months to confirm that the medication is working properly and that possible side effects are avoided. At this time, you can discuss how long you might need to take this medication.

Is *clomipramine* addictive?

Clomipramine 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 for you to stop taking clomipramine, your doctor will explain how to safely lower the dose so you won’t feel any unpleasant “flu-like” effects (chills, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, tingling in hands and feet, muscle aches, fever and electrical sensations) as your body adjusts to being without this medication.

What are the side effects of *clomipramine* and what should I do if I get them?

As with most medications, side effects may occur when taking traditional antidepressants. Most side effects are mild and temporary. Sometimes, the side effects may occur before any of the beneficial effects. It is possible for some individuals to experience side effects that they feel are serious or long lasting. If this occurs, speak to your doctor about ways to manage them. Below are some of the common side effects and potentially serious side effects of taking traditional antidepressants. In brackets are suggested ways to lessen these effects.

Common side effects

Side effects may be more common when starting a medication or after a dose increase. If any of these side effects is too troublesome for you, please discuss them with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

- Blurred vision (*usually disappears in 1-2 weeks; use bright lights or a magnifying glass when reading*)
- Constipation (*try drinking more fluids, exercising, or increasing the amount of fiber in your diet*)
- Daytime drowsiness (*do not drive or operate machinery until you know how this medication affects you*)
- Dry eyes (*try using artificial tears eye drops*)
- Dry mouth (*try chewing sugarless gum or sucking hard sugar-free candies, ice chips, or popsicles. Discuss this with your doctor if it becomes severe*)
- Dizziness or lightheadedness (*try getting up slowly from a sitting or lying down position. Do not drive or operate machinery until you know how this medication affects you*)
- Headache (*try using a pain reliever like acetaminophen (Tylenol[®])*)
- Increased sweating, nervousness, shakiness (tremors)
- Memory problems, confusion
- Stomach upset, nausea, vomiting (*try taking with food*)
- Weight gain, increase in appetite (*monitor your food intake, increase your exercise*)
- In Adolescents/Adults: Changes in sexual performance or interest (*discuss with your doctor*)



This medication may affect your ability to drive, operate machinery or carry out tasks that require mental alertness. This effect may be more pronounced if taken with alcohol.

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:

- Change in mood to an unusual state of excitement, irritability or happiness
- Chest pain; strong, irregular or fast heart beat
- Difficulty urinating
- Seizures (also called fits or convulsions)
- Skin rash, itchy skin or hives
- Thoughts of self-harm, hostility or suicide
- Uncomfortable sense of inner restlessness or agitation
- Confusion, shakiness, fever, sweating, muscle jerking (*This effect is very rare. If you experience any of these signs of “serotonin syndrome”, stop this medication immediately and seek emergency medical help.*)
- In females: irregular menstrual periods

What precautions should my doctor and I be aware of when taking *clomipramine*?

Many medications may interact with clomipramine, including cough and cold medications such as pseudoephedrine (Sudafed®); antihistamines or sleep aides such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl®, Nytol®) and doxylamine (Unisom®); anti-anxiety medications such as lorazepam (Ativan®) and clonazepam (Rivotril®); antidepressants; mood stabilizers such as valproic acid/divalproex sodium (Depakene®/Epival®), carbamazepine (Tegretol®) and lithium (Carbolith®, Lithane®); monoamine oxidase inhibitors such as selegiline (Eldepryl®) or phenelzine (Nardil®); antibiotics such as moxifloxacin (Avelox®), and several others. If you are (or begin) taking any other prescription or over-the-counter medications, be sure to check with your doctor or pharmacist to see if they are safe to use. Your doctor may need to change the doses of your medication(s) or monitor you carefully for side effects if you are taking certain other medications.

Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you:

- have any allergies or have experienced a bad reaction to clomipramine or any other medication
- have a heart condition (e.g., heart attack, congestive heart failure, irregular heart beat) or a family history of fainting, strong or irregular heart beat, or sudden death
- have a seizure disorder
- have liver or kidney problems
- have blood or thyroid disorders
- have glaucoma (an eye disease)
- have high or low blood pressure
- have trouble urinating
- have bipolar disorder, schizophrenia or any other psychiatric condition
- have thoughts of self harm, hostility or suicide
- drink alcohol regularly or have a history of alcohol or drug abuse/addiction
- miss a period, become pregnant or are trying to become pregnant or are breast-feeding

What special instructions should I follow while using *clomipramine*?

- Keep all appointments with your doctor. Inform your doctor about your symptoms. Your doctor may order certain assessments and tests (for example: blood pressure, electrocardiogram (ECG) or blood tests for clomipramine levels) to check for side effects and how you are responding to clomipramine.
- Do not allow anyone else to use your medication.

What should I do if I forget to take a dose of *clomipramine*?

If you forget to take a dose, take it as soon as you remember. Take any remaining doses for that day at evenly spaced intervals. However, if it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and continue with your regular dosing schedule. Do NOT double your next dose.



What storage conditions are needed for *clomipramine*?

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

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.

Developed by the health care professionals of the Child & Adolescent Mental Health Programs and reviewed by the staff of the Kelty Resource Centre.