

Amitriptyline

Elavil (US brand discontinued), available as generic, an older antidepressant that also quiets pain nerves

Amitriptyline lifts low mood, and it is also one of the most trusted medicines for nerve pain, migraines, and restless sleep.

WHAT IT TREATS

Depression, nerve pain, migraine

HOW YOU TAKE IT

By mouth, usually at bedtime

WHEN IT WORKS

Pain 1-2 wks; mood 4-6 wks

HABIT FORMING

No

⚠️ IMPORTANT SAFETY WARNING

Antidepressants can bring on new or worse thoughts of suicide, most often in people under **25** and in the first weeks. Anyone taking it should be watched closely for a darkening mood, and should call or text **988** if those thoughts start.

① WHAT THIS MEDICINE DOES

- **Amitriptyline** is one of the older antidepressants. It raises serotonin and norepinephrine, two brain chemicals that steady mood.
- It also turns down pain nerves that have become too easy to set off, which is why it is used for nerve pain and migraines.
- Being offered it for pain or sleep does not mean anyone thinks your pain is imagined. It works on real nerve signals.
- It is not a painkiller you reach for during a flare. It helps by being in your body steadily, day after day.

🕒 HOW TO TAKE IT

- Take **amitriptyline** at bedtime. It makes most people sleepy, so a night-time dose turns that into something useful.
- You can take it with or without food. Having it with a snack helps if it leaves your stomach feeling unsettled.
- Swallow the tablet whole with water. Do not crush or chew it, since the coating is what keeps the bitter taste away.
- If you miss a dose and morning has already come, skip it and take the next one at bedtime. Do not double up.
- Keep it in its own bottle, up high or locked away. This medicine is dangerous in **overdose**, so safe storage matters.

🔪 WHAT TO EXPECT

- For nerve pain or migraines, many people feel a real change in **1 to 2 weeks**, with more relief by about 6 weeks.
- For depression, allow **4 to 6 weeks** for the full lift. Sleep and appetite usually improve before your mood does.
- Sleepiness and dry mouth are strongest in the first week or two, then most people find they settle a good deal.
- Working looks like sleeping through more nights, fewer sharp pain days, and slowly caring about things again.

♥️ COMMON SIDE EFFECTS

- Dry mouth: sip water often, chew sugar-free gum, and keep up dental visits, because a dry mouth invites cavities.
- Constipation: drink more water, add fruit and whole grains, and ask your pharmacist about a gentle stool softener.
- Drowsiness: an earlier evening dose often helps. Tell your prescriber if mornings still feel heavy after two weeks.
- Dizziness when you stand: get up in stages. Sit first, then stand, and hold something steady for a few seconds.
- Blurry close-up vision: it usually eases over a few weeks, so hold off on new glasses until your eyes settle.
- More appetite and some weight gain: regular meal times and a daily walk make the biggest difference over months.

⚠️ CALL YOUR PRESCRIBER OR GET HELP RIGHT AWAY IF

- New or worse thoughts of suicide: call or text **988** now, and tell your prescriber today.
- Chest pain, fainting, or a heartbeat that races or skips beats means call **911** right away.
- For any suspected **overdose**, call **911** at once. Too much of this medicine harms the heart.
- Trouble passing urine, or confusion with hot dry skin, needs a same-day call to your prescriber.

🚫 WHAT TO AVOID

- Skip alcohol. Together with **amitriptyline** it can make you very drowsy and unsteady enough to fall or crash.
- Do not drive or use machinery until you know how the next morning feels. The sleepy effect often lasts into the day.
- Tell every prescriber and pharmacist. It clashes with some antidepressants, cold remedies, and heart rhythm medicines.
- Take extra care in the heat. This medicine makes it harder to sweat, so drink water and step into the shade often.
- If you are pregnant, nursing, or hoping to be, raise it early so you and your prescriber can weigh it together.

⚠️ STOPPING IT SAFELY

- Do not stop on your own, even if you feel fine. Feeling well usually means the medicine is doing its job.
- Stopping suddenly can bring headache, nausea, vivid dreams, and a wired feeling that lasts for several days.
- Your prescriber will step the amount down over **2 to 4 weeks** or longer, which prevents nearly all of that.
- If side effects are what is bothering you, say so. There are other choices, and switching is planned, not sudden.

❓ QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Are we treating my mood, my pain, my sleep, or more than one?
- How will we know it is working, and by when should I expect that?
- Do I need a heart tracing or any blood tests while I take this?
- What is the safest way to store this at home with kids around?

Where this information comes from

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NOTE

Sources are listed in APA 7th edition style. This handout is general information about a medicine, not medical advice, and it does not replace the instructions from your own prescriber or pharmacist. Never start, change, or stop a medicine on your own. If you think you are having a serious reaction, call your prescriber; if you cannot breathe, cannot stay awake, or are thinking of harming yourself, call 911 or 988 right away.