

Venlafaxine

Effexor XR, an antidepressant called an SNRI

Venlafaxine works on two brain chemicals at once to lift mood and quiet constant, gnawing worry.

WHAT IT TREATS

Depression, anxiety, panic

HOW YOU TAKE IT

Once daily, **WITH** food

WHEN IT WORKS

1-2 weeks; fuller by 6-8

HABIT FORMING

No

⚠️ IMPORTANT SAFETY WARNING

Antidepressants can raise the risk of suicidal thoughts in people under **25**, mostly in the first weeks or after a dose change. Tell someone right away and call your prescriber. Do not stop the medicine on your own.

🕒 WHAT THIS MEDICINE DOES

- **Venlafaxine** is an antidepressant. It raises serotonin and norepinephrine, two chemicals that steady mood, focus, and energy.
- It treats depression, constant worry, social anxiety, and panic. It is also used for hot flashes and some nerve pain.
- At lower doses it acts mostly on serotonin. The second chemical kicks in as the dose goes up, which is why dose steps matter.
- It is not habit forming, but your body does adjust to it, so it must be stopped slowly with your prescriber's help.

🕒 HOW TO TAKE IT

- Take the long-acting capsule once a day **with food**, at about the same time each day. Food steadies how it is absorbed.
- Swallow it whole. Do not crush or chew. If swallowing is hard, ask whether you may open it and sprinkle it on applesauce.
- Your prescriber will start low and step the dose up over weeks. Never speed that up on your own to feel better sooner.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember that day. Never take two, and never try to catch up.
- Refill early. This medicine leaves the body fast, so even one missed day can make you feel dizzy and unwell.

📈 WHAT TO EXPECT

- Sleep, appetite, and energy usually shift first, in about **1 to 2 weeks**. Mood and worry tend to improve after that.
- Give it **4 to 6 weeks** at a full dose before you judge it. The fullest benefit can take 8 to 12 weeks.
- Side effects often arrive before the benefit does. That gap is the single most common reason people quit too early.
- Expect your blood pressure to be checked as the dose rises. This medicine can push it up, and that is easy to catch early.

💧 COMMON SIDE EFFECTS

- Nausea is very common in the first week or two. Taking it with a real meal is the single most effective fix.
- Sweating more than usual, sometimes drenching, is a signature effect. Layers, cool drinks, and cotton clothing help.
- Trouble sleeping, dry mouth, and headache are common early. Less caffeine and a fixed bedtime make a real difference.
- Sexual side effects are common: less desire, delayed orgasm, or erection trouble. Say so, because there are real fixes.
- Dizziness when you stand up can happen. Get up slowly and drink enough water, especially in hot weather.
- Constipation and appetite changes come up often. Fiber, fluids, and daily movement handle most of it.

⚠️ CALL YOUR PRESCRIBER OR GET HELP RIGHT AWAY IF

- New or worse thoughts of suicide, especially early or after a dose change: call or text **988** now and tell someone today.
- Call **911** for agitation with fever, stiff muscles, a racing heart, or twitching. That can mean too much serotonin.
- Call **911** for sudden eye pain with blurred vision and halos around lights. That can be dangerous eye pressure.
- Call your prescriber for blood pressure readings that keep climbing, or for new confusion in an older adult.

🚫 WHAT TO AVOID

- Skip alcohol. It works against the medicine, worsens dizziness, and makes both sleep and low mood harder to fix.
- Ask before any new medicine, herb, or supplement. St. John's wort, tramadol, and migraine triptans are the big ones.
- Tell your prescriber about stimulants or decongestants. Together with **venlafaxine** they can push blood pressure higher.
- Check before regular ibuprofen, naproxen, or aspirin. Together they raise your chance of stomach bleeding.
- Tell your prescriber if you are pregnant, nursing, or planning to be. That is a choice to weigh together, not alone.

🛑 STOPPING IT SAFELY

- Never stop on your own. **Venlafaxine** is among the hardest antidepressants to come off, and quitting fast feels awful.
- Stopping fast can bring dizziness, electric-shock feelings in your head, nausea, irritability, and a flu-like ache.
- Those feelings are not addiction and not a relapse. They mean your body needs a slower, smaller step down.
- Your prescriber will taper over **at least 4 weeks**, often much longer. Build that plan together before you change anything.

❓ QUESTIONS TO ASK

- How often should my blood pressure be checked on this medicine?
- How slowly will we lower the dose when it is time to stop?
- What can we try if the sweating or sexual side effects do not ease up?
- Who do I call after hours if I start feeling worse instead of better?

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.