

Your child's medication: Venlafaxine for cataplexy

Information for children, families and carers

We have given you this factsheet because your child has been diagnosed with a condition called narcolepsy with cataplexy and has been prescribed a medication called venlafaxine as part of their treatment programme. This factsheet explains how your child should take venlafaxine. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

Please note that our information may differ from that provided by the medication manufacturer. This is because their information usually relates to adults.

Venlafaxine hydrochloride

Venlafaxine is from a group of antidepressants called serotonin and noradrenaline reuptake inhibitors, or SNRIs. It is thought to work by increasing the levels of mood-enhancing chemicals called serotonin and noradrenaline in the brain. It is most commonly used to treat depression and sometimes anxiety and panic attacks, but it can also be used to control the symptoms of cataplexy in narcolepsy.

How does venlafaxine help to treat cataplexy?

Narcolepsy is a long-term condition which disrupts the normal sleep/wake cycle.

Common symptoms of narcolepsy include:

- falling asleep at inappropriate times during the day
- fragmented night-time sleep
- excessive daytime sleepiness

In addition to this, some people experience sudden muscle weakness or loss of muscle control, known as cataplexy. This can be triggered by strong emotions such as laughter, anger, surprise or fright.

There is currently no known cure for narcolepsy. However, we can help to manage your child's symptoms with a combination of:

- scheduled daytime naps
- lifestyle changes
- venlafaxine medication and/or other medications

Venlafaxine is thought to work by interfering with certain chemicals in the brain which may be involved in causing the symptoms of cataplexy.

Is venlafaxine suitable for everyone?

Venlafaxine should be used with caution if your child has:

- experienced cardiac arrhythmias
- diabetes
- heart disease
- epilepsy (a condition that affects the brain and causes frequent seizures)
- a history of bipolar disorder with mania (a psychological condition that causes a person to experience unreasonable euphoria, very intense moods, hyperactivity, and delusions)
- kidney problems
- liver problems
- uncontrolled high blood pressure
- a history or risk of glaucoma (a rare eye condition where the optic nerve, which connects the eye to the brain, can become damaged if the condition is not treated)

How to take venlafaxine

Venlafaxine comes as:

- slow-release tablets
- immediate-release tablets
- an immediate-release oral solution (a liquid)

Your child should take the medication as instructed. For slow-release tablets, this will be with breakfast in the morning.

Venlafaxine takes up to three hours to work. Your child will begin to notice a difference in their symptoms within five to six days.

Your child should not stop taking venlafaxine suddenly or without the support of our sleep clinic.

Dose

Venlafaxine comes in 37.5mg, 75mg or 150mg tablets and 37.5mg in 5mls and 75mg in 5mls oral solution. Slow-release tablets are commonly prescribed for cataplexy, but we may prescribe immediate-release tablets or an oral solution if the slow-release tablets are not tolerated or are unavailable. We will prescribe your child a low dose to start with. We will increase the dose gradually to minimise the risk of side effects and to control your child's symptoms. We will discuss your child's dose regime with you.

It is important that you follow the instructions about how much your child should take. The dose will be shown on the medication label.

Storage

Keep your child's medication in a locked cupboard.

Other medications

Check with us before your child takes any new medication while they are taking venlafaxine. Check with your pharmacist before your child takes any over-the-counter medication.

Alcohol

Drinking alcohol while taking venlafaxine may lead to increased sleepiness.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding

Venlafaxine should only be taken during pregnancy if the benefits outweigh the risks.

Contact us for advice if your child:

- is pregnant
- is planning to have a baby
- thinks they may be pregnant
- is breastfeeding

Travel

If you need a letter in order to travel abroad with your child's medication, please contact us as soon as possible so we can arrange this.

Monitoring

Before your child starts taking venlafaxine, we will check their height, weight, and blood pressure. We will then need to see your child in our sleep clinic regularly while they are taking venlafaxine.

What if my child takes too much venlafaxine?

It can be dangerous to take too much venlafaxine.

If your child takes too much venlafaxine, call NHS **111** for advice and have the medication or packaging to hand. In an emergency, take your child to your nearest emergency department. Make sure to take your child's medication container and packaging in with you, even if it is empty. This will help the healthcare professional caring for your child.

What if my child misses a dose of venlafaxine?

Slow release preparation (medication once a day):

If your child has missed their latest dose of venlafaxine and there are more than 12 hours before their next dose is due, you should give them the missed dose as soon as you remember. Give the next dose at the usual time.

Never give a double dose of venlafaxine. If your child has missed their latest dose of venlafaxine and there are less than 12 hours before their next dose is due, do not give them the missed dose. Give the next dose at the usual time.

Normal release preparation (medication twice a day):

If your child has missed their latest dose of venlafaxine and there are more than six hours before their next dose is due, you should give them the missed dose as soon as you remember. Give the next dose at the usual time.

Never give a double dose of venlafaxine. If your child has missed their latest dose of venlafaxine and there are less than six hours before their next dose is due, do not give them the missed dose. Give the next dose at the usual time.

What if my child is sick (vomits) after taking a dose of venlafaxine?

Do not repeat the first dose. This is because it can be difficult to know how much was absorbed.

Side effects

As with all medications, there may be side effects with taking venlafaxine. We will prescribe your child a low dose to start with, to reduce the chance of side effects.

Common side effects

- Anxiety, mood changes or behavioural changes - Keep an eye on how your child is feeling or behaving.
- A change in appetite, a dry mouth, stomach ache, nausea (feeling sick), constipation or diarrhoea - To help with this, your child should eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of water.
- Arrhythmia (an abnormality in the heart's rhythm) and heart palpitations (where your heartbeat becomes more noticeable)

For a full list of the possible side effects, please see the manufacturer's leaflet that comes with your child's medication.

If your child experiences any of the side effects listed above or you have any concerns about your child, please contact us for advice. Outside of our working hours, contact NHS **111** for advice.

General advice for medication

- Try to give your child their medication at about the same time(s) each day to help you remember.
- Never give your child's medication to anyone else, even if their condition appears to be the same, as this could be dangerous.
- **If you think that someone else has taken your child's medication by accident, contact the person's general practitioner (GP) or NHS 111 immediately, or take them to the nearest emergency department if they are unwell.**
- If you think the medication is not working, contact us but continue to give the medication as usual. Do not give any extra doses as this may be dangerous.
- Make sure that your child always has enough medication. Order a new prescription at least two weeks before it runs out.
- Make sure the medication your child has at home has not reached the 'best before' or 'use by' date on the packaging. Give old medication to your local pharmacy to dispose of.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

Sleep clinic

Telephone: **023 8120 5922** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

Email: paedssleepadmin@uhs.nhs.uk

Useful links

www.nhs.uk/conditions/narcolepsy

www.nhs.uk/medicines/venlafaxine

www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk/advice-guides/general-information-about-medicines/unlicensed-medicines

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For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport

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