

What is this medication used for?

Nortriptyline is a tricyclic antidepressant (TCA). Low doses of nortriptyline can be effective for treating several types of pain including **fibromyalgia, migraines, neuropathic pain, and lower back pain**. TCAs can also help with symptoms of **irritable bowel syndrome, interstitial cystitis, and insomnia**.

Nortriptyline may also be used to treat anxiety or depression. When taken in a low dose, it helps with pain in a different way than it helps with mood. This means that people who don't have anxiety or depression can still use it safely to help with pain.

How do I take this medication?

Your CCDP doctor or pharmacist will work with you to make a plan for taking this medication.

If you are sensitive to medications, start at a low dose (10 mg taken 1 time each day). Slowly increase the dose by 10 mg every 1 or 2 weeks. The usual recommended dose for people with fibromyalgia is 25 to 75 mg taken each day.

It is best to take nortriptyline at night (about 2 hours before bedtime). You can take nortriptyline with or without food. **Do not stop taking it suddenly.**

When will the medication start to work?

At a dose of 25 to 75 mg taken each day, you may start to feel less pain after 1 week. It may take up to 4 weeks to feel the full effect.

Precautions to take

Before you start taking nortriptyline, tell your doctor or pharmacist if you:

- Have a history of seizures, heart failure, glaucoma, bipolar disorder, kidney or liver problems
- Have a personal or family history of QTc prolongation
- Are pregnant, breastfeeding or planning to become pregnant
- Are taking any other medications, vitamins or supplements. Some medications and supplements increase serotonin or affect heart rhythm (QTc) and may have negative effects with nortriptyline.

This is not a complete list. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information.

Possible side effects

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| • Dizziness | • Fast heart rate |
| • Drowsiness | • Nausea |
| • Headache | • Increased appetite |
| • Blurred vision | • Constipation |
| • Dry mouth | • Difficulty peeing |

Your doctor or pharmacist may recommend that you get an electrocardiogram (ECG), a test to check your heart rhythm (QTc) before starting nortriptyline.

You may experience mild side effects such as headaches and nausea. These usually get better within 1 to 2 weeks of starting nortriptyline. If the side effects do not improve or you would like to stop taking nortriptyline, speak to your doctor or pharmacist to decrease the dose slowly and safely.

Possible side effects continued

Contact your doctor immediately if you experience:

- A fast heart rate, excessive sweating, agitation, muscle tremors or stiffness. These can be symptoms of a rare side effect called serotonin syndrome.
- Thoughts of hurting yourself or of suicide

Call 911 if you have an allergic reaction (swollen lips or tongue, breathing problems, rash on most of the body) or if you have experienced a seizure after taking nortriptyline. This is an emergency.

How is the medication supplied and what will it cost?

Nortriptyline is available in 10 mg and 25 mg capsules

Nortriptyline usually costs **\$60 to \$300 for a 3-month supply**, but prices can vary by strength of the capsules and pharmacy dispensing fees. Ask your pharmacy about cost before you fill the prescription. You can always transfer your prescription to a different pharmacy.

Nortriptyline is covered under the provincial drug plan (BC Pharmacare) and most private insurers. Some Pharmacare and private insurance plans may require patients to pay a deductible before they begin to cover the cost of any medication.

Note for CCDP Patients

Please contact the CCDP to schedule a pharmacist appointment if you have any questions about this medication, including questions about side effects and dose changes.