

What is this medication used for?

Venlafaxine is used to treat depression, anxiety, hot flashes and night sweats due to menopause, and several types of pain including **fibromyalgia, neuropathic pain, migraines, lower back pain, and osteoarthritis.**

Venlafaxine is a serotonin norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor (SNRI) that relieves pain by increasing the level of serotonin and norepinephrine in the brain. People who don't have anxiety or depression can still use it safely to help with pain.

Duloxetine is the most used SNRI to treat pain due to fibromyalgia as it has been studied more often than venlafaxine. However, venlafaxine is also effective for pain and may be chosen over duloxetine for other reasons. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist to learn more about which medication is right for you.

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 of 37.5 mg taken 1 time each day. Slowly increase the dose by 37.5 mg every few weeks. The usual recommended dose for people with fibromyalgia is at least 150 mg taken each day to select for the pain-regulating messenger, norepinephrine.

Take venlafaxine at the same time each day with food. Swallow the capsule whole; do not open, crush or chew it. **Do not stop taking venlafaxine suddenly.**

When will the medication start to work?

Most people experience pain relief and overall benefit after 1 week of taking 150 mg each day. It may take up to 4 weeks for you to experience the full benefit of the medication.

Precautions to take

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

- Have a history of high blood pressure, bipolar disorder, glaucoma, kidney or liver problems
- 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 venlafaxine.

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

Possible side effects

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| • Dizziness | • Nausea |
| • Headache | • Constipation |
| • Anxiety | • Change in sexual performance |
| • Increased blood pressure | • Sweating, tremors, seizures |

You may experience mild side effects such as headaches and nausea. These usually get better within 1 to 2 weeks of starting venlafaxine. If the side effects do not improve or you would like to stop taking venlafaxine, 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 venlafaxine. This is an emergency.

How is the medication supplied and what will it cost?

Venlafaxine is available in 37.5 mg, 75 mg and 150 mg capsules.

Venlafaxine usually costs **\$20 to \$100 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.

Venlafaxine 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.