

Amitriptyline for Trigeminal Neuralgia

A guide for patients

What is Amitriptyline?

Amitriptyline (brand name: Endep) is an older medication originally developed as an antidepressant. However, it's now widely used in chronic nerve pain conditions at lower doses, including trigeminal neuralgia – a condition causing sharp, electric-shock-like pain in the face. While not a first-line treatment for trigeminal neuralgia, it can be useful in selected cases, particularly if the pain has a constant, burning quality or if sleep disturbance and mood symptoms are also present.

How It Works

Amitriptyline works by increasing levels of certain natural chemicals in the brain and nervous system, mainly serotonin and noradrenaline, that help reduce the perception of pain. It also calms overactive pain-signalling nerves, helping to reduce both the severity and frequency of facial pain attacks.

In plain terms: it lowers the 'chatter' between nerves that might be misfiring and causing pain.

Typical Dosing and Escalation

- Starting dose: Usually 10 or 12.5 mg an hour before bedtime.
- Tablet sizes: 10 mg, 25 mg and 50 mg tablets
- Dose escalation: The dose is increased by 10 to 12.5 every 1–2 weeks depending on how well it's tolerated and how effective it is.
- Target dose: 25–75 mg per night.
- Maximum dose: Can go up to 150 mg per day in divided doses, though this is rare in pain management.
- Because amitriptyline can cause drowsiness, it's taken in the evening. Starting low and going slow helps the body adjust and reduces side effects.

How Long Until It Works?

It may take 1 to 3 weeks to notice significant improvement in pain, though some benefit may be felt earlier. For full effect, it may take 4 to 6 weeks. It's important to take it consistently and not to stop suddenly without medical advice.

Common Side Effects

Most side effects are mild and tend to improve with time or dose adjustment. They include:

- Dry mouth and eyes
- Drowsiness or grogginess
- Constipation
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Weight gain or increased appetite
- Blurred vision
- Less common: Difficulty urinating or heart rhythm changes – let your doctor know if you experience these.
- Like most of the medications used to treat trigeminal neuralgia, amitriptyline may be teratogenic (Category C) and should be avoided in pregnancy when possible.

Important Tips

- Avoid alcohol, as it can increase drowsiness.
- Tell your doctor if you have heart problems, glaucoma, or prostate issues.
- Not addictive, but don't stop abruptly – dose needs to be reduced slowly.
- Works best when part of a consistent routine.
- Inform your doctor of all other medications and supplements.

Final Word

Amitriptyline can be a helpful part of managing trigeminal neuralgia, especially when pain has a burning, aching quality or when sleep is affected. It's generally well tolerated at low doses and can offer real relief when used consistently.

If you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to reach out.