

Quetiapine (que-tie-a-peen)

Patient Information – Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy

Why have I been prescribed quetiapine?

Quetiapine is an antipsychotic and is used to treat schizophrenia and psychosis.

When people have schizophrenia, they may hear voices talking to them or about them. They may also become suspicious or paranoid. Some people also have problems with their thinking and feel that other people can read their thoughts. These are called “positive symptoms”.

Quetiapine can help to relieve these symptoms. Many people with schizophrenia also experience “negative symptoms”. They feel tired and lacking in energy and may become quite inactive and withdrawn. Quetiapine may help relieve these symptoms as well.

Quetiapine is also used for bipolar affective disorder, agitation, anxiety, mania, depression and can be used to help manage sleep.

Quetiapine may also be prescribed for people who have had side effects, such as unusual movements or shaking, with older types of antipsychotics. Quetiapine does not usually cause these effects.

Older drugs may also increase levels of the hormone prolactin which can lead to either less interest in sex or problems having sex. Quetiapine does not usually increase prolactin.

What exactly is quetiapine?

Quetiapine is one of a group of medicines used to treat schizophrenia and similar disorders. These illnesses are sometimes referred to as psychoses, hence the name given to this group of medicines which is the “antipsychotics”.

Quetiapine is a newer type of antipsychotic. It probably works in a different way and has different side effects from older antipsychotics. Quetiapine has been available since 1997.

Quetiapine may help people who have negative symptoms and have not got much better on the older antipsychotics.



Is quetiapine safe to have?

It is usually safe to take quetiapine regularly as prescribed by your doctor, but it doesn't suit everyone.

Let your doctor know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care may be needed:

- If you suffer from epilepsy, heart, kidney or liver trouble;
- If you are pregnant, breast feeding, or wish to become pregnant.

How should I take quetiapine?

Look at the label on your medicine; it should have all the necessary instructions on it. Follow these directions carefully. Always take your tablets with a full glass of water. Quetiapine is usually taken once or twice a day. If you have any questions, speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

What should I do if I miss a dose?

Never change your dose without consulting with your doctor.

If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember, as long as it is within two or three hours of the usual time.

What will happen to me when I start taking quetiapine?

Antipsychotics do not work straight away. It may take several days or even weeks for some of the symptoms to reduce. To begin with, most people find that this medication will help them feel more relaxed and calmer. Later, after one or two weeks, other symptoms should begin to improve.

You might get some side effects before you start to feel better. Most side effects should go away after a few weeks. Look at the table over the page. It tells you what to do if you get any of the usual side effects shown. Not everyone will get the side effects shown.

There are many other possible side effects. Ask your pharmacist, doctor or nurse if you are worried about anything else that you think might be a side effect.

Are there any medicines I should avoid or take care with?

Always consult with your doctor or pharmacist before starting a new medicine or purchasing medicines over the counter. Quetiapine, when combined with some other medicines, can cause unpleasant side effects. You should avoid sedating antihistamines and cough and cold preparations which contain sedating antihistamines as these can make you sleepy.

When I feel better, can I stop taking quetiapine?

No. If you stop taking quetiapine your original symptoms may return, but this may not be for three to six months after you stop the drug.

You and your doctor should decide together when you can come off it. Most people need to be on quetiapine for quite a long time, sometimes years. This is not thought to be harmful. Quetiapine is not addictive.

What about alcohol and marijuana?

It is recommended that when you take quetiapine to avoid drinking alcohol, using marijuana or other recreational drugs. These taken with quetiapine can make some people drowsy. They can lessen the effect of quetiapine and add to side effects such as making you clumsy. This can lead to falls or accidents. As well as this, using recreational drugs can make your psychosis worse or your mood unstable.

Once you are used to your quetiapine you can sometimes drink alcohol in small amounts without any harm. If you want a drink, try a glass of your normal drink and see how you feel. If it doesn't make you feel drowsy and clumsy, it is probably okay to drink small amounts.

It pays to be very cautious because alcohol affects people in different ways, especially when they are taking medication.

It is recognised that many road accidents occur because of mixing alcohol, marijuana or other recreational drugs with these medicines. Don't stop taking quetiapine just because you fancy a joint or a drink at the weekend.

What is the metabolic syndrome?

Antipsychotics can occasionally cause something called the metabolic syndrome. This is a combination of weight gain, raised cholesterol and raised blood sugars. Some antipsychotics are more likely to cause the metabolic syndrome than others. When you start an antipsychotic, your weight, height and waist size will be measured.

A heart test called an ECG and several blood tests will also be completed. These will be repeated several times during the first year that you are on an antipsychotic to ensure that you remain healthy.

It is important when you start an antipsychotic that you eat a healthy diet and that you do some regular exercise. Talk to your case manager or doctor for advice about this. They may also offer to refer you to a dietitian.

Remember, leaflets like this can only describe some of the effects of medication. You may also find other books or leaflets useful. If you have access to the internet, you may find a lot of information there as well. Be careful as internet-based information is not always accurate.

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SIDE EFFECTS	WHAT IS IT?	WHAT SHOULD I DO IF IT HAPPENS TO ME?
Common		
Dyspepsia	Stomach pain or upset.	Try taking the tablets with or after food.
Drowsiness	Feeling sleepy or sluggish. It can last for a few hours after taking your dose.	Avoid tasks you need to be alert for such as driving or using machines. Ask your doctor if you can take your quetiapine at a different time of the day.
Fairly Common		
Sexual Dysfunction	Lack of libido or no interest in sex. Inability to maintain an erection or have an orgasm.	Discuss this with your doctor when you next meet.
Uncommon		
Postural Hypotension	A low blood pressure. You may feel faint when you stand up.	Try not to stand up too quickly. If you feel dizzy, don't drive. This dizziness is not dangerous.
Dry Mouth	Your mouth will feel dry and you will not produce much saliva (spit). Dry mouth can cause problems with speech, taste, chewing and swallowing. It can also increase the risk of getting dental decay and infection in your mouth.	Sugar-free boiled sweets, chewing gum or eating citrus fruits usually helps. If not, try frequent, small sips of water, or ask your pharmacist for a mouthwash. A change in medicine or dose may be possible. To help prevent dental problems sip water regularly to moisten your mouth. Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. Avoid sugary drinks and snacks between meals. Try sugar free chewing gum to stimulate saliva or discuss using an oral lubricant with your pharmacist or dentist.
Blurred Vision	Things look fuzzy and you can't focus properly.	See your doctor if you are worried. This doesn't mean you will need glasses.
Constipation	Feeling "bunched up" inside. You can't pass a bowel motion.	Eat more fibre, e.g. bran and vegetables and do more exercise. Make sure you drink plenty of fluid. A mild laxative from a pharmacy might help.
Tachycardia	This is a fast heartbeat. It may feel like palpitations.	It is not usually dangerous. It can be easily treated if it lasts a long time.
Weight Gain	Eating more and putting on weight.	Try and avoid putting on weight in the first place. Eat a healthy diet full of vegetables and fibre. Do physical activities such as walking. Avoid fatty foods like chocolate, crisps and fizzy drinks. Ask to see a dietitian if you need help with food choices.