

## Quetiapine (say: quet-ire-pean) for psychosis in Parkinson's Disease

### What is quetiapine used for?

- Quetiapine (also called Seroquel® and others) is mainly used to help treat the symptoms of psychosis, schizophrenia, mania and bipolar depression, and to help stop these coming back
- It can be used to help depression, anxiety and sleep if used with other medicines
- Quetiapine can also, however, be used for the psychosis that can occur in Parkinson's Disease
- It is made as plain tablets and sustained release (XL) tablets. A liquid is also made.

Dopamine is a chemical messenger in the brain that has several actions. Two of the main ones are relaxing muscles and managing thoughts:

1. The symptoms of Parkinson's Disease are caused by *too little* dopamine in one part of the brain called the 'Extra-Pyramidal System' (or EPS for short). This means the body can't relax muscles properly, so they get stiff and shake
2. The symptoms of psychosis are mainly caused by *too much* dopamine in some parts of the brain (mainly the mesolimbic system)
  - The main medicines used for Parkinson's Disease increase the amount of dopamine across the whole brain, helping you to relax your muscles
  - The problem with this is that these medicines also increase dopamine in the mesolimbic system as well, which can trigger or cause psychosis
  - The antipsychotics used to treat psychosis block the effects of dopamine in the brain which, in turn, causes a lack of dopamine in the EPS, and this, in turn, makes the symptoms of Parkinson's Disease worse
  - However, quetiapine seems to be an antipsychotic that may help the symptoms of psychosis *without* making Parkinson's Disease symptoms worse.

### What is the usual dose of quetiapine?

- For Parkinson's Disease the usual dose starts at 12.5mg a day (usually at night) and is then increased once or twice a week to up to about 50-150mg a day
- The dose for schizophrenia and mania is much higher and can be up to 800mg a day.

### How should I take quetiapine?

- Swallow the tablets whole (do **not** chew them) with at least half a glass of water whilst sitting or standing, so they do not stick in your throat
- If you have the liquid, use a medicine spoon, dropper or oral syringe to carefully measure doses.

### When should I take quetiapine?

- The XL tablets can be taken once a day, usually best at bedtime as it may make you sleepy at first
- The plain tablets or liquid may be taken twice a day, usually morning and evening, with or without food
- You may just want to take a dose when the symptoms are at their worst.

### What are the alternatives to quetiapine?

- There are very few alternatives unfortunately
- Other antipsychotics either make Parkinson's Disease symptoms worse or don't help
- Clozapine is the antipsychotic most likely to help, but it has many side effects and needs regular blood monitoring
- Pimavanserin is a medicine available in the USA, but this isn't yet available in Europe
- Sometimes AChEs (such as donepezil, galantamine or rivastigmine) can help. These are usually used for memory problems.

### How long will quetiapine take to work?

- It can start working fairly quickly, in a few days, but the effect then builds over the next few weeks.

### How long will I need to keep taking it for?

- Quetiapine may take several weeks to start working
- You may carry on getting better for several weeks or months
- If it does not help in 4-8 weeks, you may need a change in medicine.

### Is quetiapine addictive and can I stop taking it suddenly?

- Quetiapine is not addictive but it is unwise to stop taking it suddenly, even if you feel better
- Your symptoms can return if treatment is stopped too early. This may occur some weeks or even months after quetiapine has been stopped
- You might also get some symptoms e.g. stomach upset, and difficulty sleeping
- When the time comes, be kind to your brain and come off it by a slow reduction in the dose over several months, when your stress levels are low
- You should discuss this fully with your prescriber, nurse or pharmacist.

See our handy fact sheet on 'Coming off medicines'

### What should I do if I forget to take a dose of quetiapine at the right time?

- XL tablets: Start again as soon as you remember unless within about 12 hours of the next dose
- Plain tablets or liquid: Start again as soon as you can, unless within about 4-6 hours of the next dose
- After this, just take the next dose as normal
- Do not try to catch up by taking two doses at once as you may get more side-effects.

If you have problems remembering your doses (as many people do) ask to see our Handy Fact Sheet "Remembering to take your medicines".

### Can I drink alcohol while I am taking it?

- If you drink alcohol while taking quetiapine it may make you feel more sleepy.

### What sort of side-effects might I get if I am taking quetiapine?

This table on the next page has some of the most common side effects and any you might need to take action on. You **must** also see the maker's Patient Information Leaflet for the full list of possible side effects but do not be worried by this. Some people get no side effects at all. Some side effects are the brain getting used to a medicine and these usually wear off in a few days or weeks. Starting at a lower dose may help. If you think you might have a side effect to quetiapine, you should ask your prescriber, pharmacist or other healthcare professional.

### Will quetiapine affect my other medication?

The main interactions with quetiapine include:

- The effect of quetiapine can be decreased by phenytoin, rifampicin or carbamazepine
- The effects of quetiapine can sometimes be increased by erythromycin or ketoconazole
- If quetiapine is taken with benzodiazepines (e.g. diazepam, lorazepam, temazepam), sleeping tablets, strong painkillers, antihistamines, or alcohol, it will cause more sleepiness.

You **must** also see the Patient Information Leaflet (PIL) for the full possible list. Some medicines can still be used together but you must follow your doctor's instructions carefully. Make sure clinician treating you knows you take quetiapine.

### Will I need any blood or other tests if I am taking quetiapine?

- You should not need any extra tests but you will need regular health checks and other measures of physical health
- Quetiapine may affect some blood tests.

### Can I drive or cycle while I am taking it?

- You may feel a bit sleepy at first when taking it
- Be careful as it may slow down your reactions
- Until this wears off, or you know how quetiapine affects you, do not drive or operate machines.

**What sort of side-effects might I get if I am taking quetiapine?**

The important thing to remember is that you will be taking a low dose. These side effects (except sleepiness) are less likely at a low dose and, if you do get them, they won't be as bad as they would be with a higher dose. Quetiapine can also make some of the symptoms of Parkinson's Disease worse e.g. constipation, feeling dizzy when you stand up, restless legs etc. If, however, you think you might have a side effect to quetiapine, you should ask your prescriber, pharmacist or other healthcare professional.

Side effect	What happens	What to do about it
<b>VERY COMMON</b> ( <i>more than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i> )		
Sleepiness	Feeling sleepy or sluggish. This can last for a few hours or longer after taking a dose.	Don't drive or use machines. Take your dose at night if you can. It may wear off after a while. Half of this usually wears off in about week, and then drops by another half again in about a month.
Postural hypotension	A low blood pressure, feeling very dizzy when you stand up	Try not to stand up too quickly. If you feel dizzy, sit or lie down. Don't drive. This usually wears off in a few days.
Dizziness	Feeling light-headed and faint.	Don't stand up too quickly. Try and lie or sit down if you feel it coming on. Don't drive.
Dry mouth	Not much saliva or spit.	Suck sugar-free gum or boiled sweets. If it is bad, your prescriber may be able to give you a mouth spray.
Weight gain	Eating more, putting on weight, especially just after starting	A diet full of vegetables, cereal and fibre may help prevent weight gain.
Elevations in serum cholesterol	An increase in cholesterol (blood fats) in the blood.	You should be tested at least every year for your physical health (see the yellow box above).
<b>COMMON</b> ( <i>fewer than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i> )		
Headache	When your head is painful and pounding.	Ask your pharmacist if it is safe to take paracetamol with any other medicines you may be taking.
Akathisia, restlessness	Being more on edge or feeling you want to be on the move. You may sweat a lot more.	Try and relax by taking deep breaths. This happens much more at the start of treatment but usually wear off in a few weeks. A slower dose increase may also help.
<b>RARE but important</b> ( <i>can be serious if not dealt with quickly</i> )		
VTE – venous thromboembolism	Chest pain, worse if you cough or breathe deeply. Coughing up blood, dizziness or fainting. Swelling or pain in the arm or leg. Rapid breathing, short of breath or odd heartbeat.	See your prescriber straight away or ring 999. The symptoms could be a blood clot moving around the body. It mostly happens in older people.
NMS (Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome)	Fever or high temperature, sweating and confusion, racing heartbeat, muscle stiffness and difficulty moving.	See your prescriber straight away if you have had a change in dose or taken other antipsychotics.
Skin rash and fever	Red rashes across the face and body, fever, blisters and inflamed nose, mouth and eyes It may look a bit like serious burning or sunburn.	Stop taking and contact your prescriber now. This can be dangerous as it might be the start of the rare Stevens-Johnson syndrome or "TEN".

**The small print:** This leaflet is to help you understand more about quetiapine for psychosis in Parkinson's Disease. You **must** also read the manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet (PIL). You may find more on the internet but beware as internet-based information is not always accurate. Do not share medicines with anyone else. Go to our website for fuller answers to these and many other questions.

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