



Waitematā
District Health Board

Best Care for Everyone

Clozapine under the care of your GP

What you need to know

About this guide

Medication is one of the many things that can help deal with difficult mental health experiences.

Clozapine may be prescribed for:

- Schizophrenia or other psychoses
- Other conditions like bipolar disorder, Parkinson's disease or Lewy-Body dementia

This guide is for people who have been prescribed clozapine and are being discharged from mental health services to their GP. If you are having problems relating to being on clozapine please talk to your GP or mental health service about other options.

Side-effects of clozapine

Clozapine can be very helpful in dealing with some of the experiences related to mental health problems; however it is also a medicine that can have serious side effects.

You should ask your GP to contact your local mental health team if you have any concerns about being on clozapine or any side-effects that could be related to clozapine.

These could be:

Heart problems

Symptoms can include shortness of breath, chest pain, heart palpitations (feeling of your heart pounding or racing, or beating is rapid or irregular as if your heart is skipping beats) or unusual tiredness. **See your GP immediately. If you cannot see your GP immediately go to your local hospital Emergency Department or phone 111.**

Flu-like symptoms

Symptoms such as sore throat, fever, feeling unwell. These symptoms may be a sign that clozapine is affecting the white blood cells that fight infection. ***Every time you have flu-like symptoms or signs of infection get an extra blood test using your usual blood test form. You must let your GP know to check the result.***

Constipation

Constipation is a very common side effect of clozapine and can affect up to six in every 10 people who take it. This can be very uncomfortable and, if not treated, can lead to serious bowel damage. **Early treatment for constipation is very important.**

Signs of constipation can be:

- changes in how often you have a bowel motion/stools
- finding it difficult to pass a bowel motion/stools
- poos are hard or lumpy
- gas, wind, bloating, or stomach cramps, pain or discomfort
- not completely emptying your bowel
- feeling like something is blocking your bowel
- needing to pee a lot more often than usual
- burning around your anus
- difficulty swallowing
- acid reflux

You need to see your doctor **IMMEDIATELY** if you experience.

- Worsening stomach or tummy pain or cramp.
- Bloating or gas in your tummy.
- Tummy looks bigger or more distended.
- Diarrhea (runny stools) especially if this is bloody.
- Fever, feeling sick (nausea), being sick (vomiting), drowsiness.
- Very bad breath

If you cannot see your GP on the same day, go to your local hospital Emergency Department.

Help with constipation

- Regular exercise such as walking or jogging
- Eating five or more servings of fruit and vegetables per day
- Eating other fibre-filled foods, such as porridge, bran, brown rice, wholegrain breads, prunes, kiwifruit and liquorice
- Drink plenty of water – a 70kg person needs 2.5 litres of fluid per day
- Increase your fluid intake when you increase your fibre intake.
- Take laxatives (medication that helps constipation as prescribed).

Other things that can affect Clozapine

- Cigarette smoking
- Caffeine/coffee
- Other medication
- Supplements

Let your GP know if you are thinking about changing the amount of cigarettes and caffeine you take daily as your clozapine dose may need to be adjusted. Let your GP know if you are taking other medications or supplements as this may interact with clozapine.



Monitoring your safety while you are taking clozapine

Seeing your GP

If you are taking clozapine you will need to see your GP for an appointment **at least every three months** for a physical health check and for your clozapine prescription. At this time your GP will ask questions about your general well-being, check for any side-effects

If you are on a benefit/allowance this can help pay for your doctor's appointments, tests and prescriptions.

If you missed your clozapine dose 2 days or more clozapine will need to be re-started at a lower dose. If you missed clozapine for 72 hours (3 days) you will also need to have weekly blood tests for 6 weeks.

Physical tests

You will need monthly blood tests to check white blood cells levels in your blood. Your GP will check your blood results and will contact you if needed.

At least once a year your GP will arrange other blood tests such as your blood glucose and cholesterol levels and liver function, and arrange an ECG (electrocardiogram) to monitor your heart.

Getting clozapine from your pharmacy

If you are taking clozapine you will collect this from your pharmacy. You need to have your monthly blood tests done so the pharmacy can give you your clozapine. It is preferable to have your medications blister-packed. Funding is available using the disability allowance. Your GP can support you with this.

If you move house

If you move please contact your GP, pharmacist and mental health services so blood monitoring and prescriptions can be moved to your new location.

Adult Mental Health Service
Moko Mental Health Service
Isa Lei Mental Health Service

North: (09) 487 1414

West: (09) 822 8501

Rodney: (09) 427 0360

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