



Using *Mirtazapine* in Children and Adolescents

This information explains how *Mirtazapine* can be used as part of a treatment plan with children and adolescents. You may wish to share this information with your family members to help them to understand your treatment options. Since every person's needs are different, it is important that you follow the advice provided to you by your own doctor, nurse and/or pharmacist and speak to them if you have any questions about this medication.



What is Mirtazapine used for?

Mirtazapine (Remeron[®], Remeron SolTab[®]) belongs to a group of medications called antidepressants.

Like many medications commonly used to treat childhood disorders, mirtazapine has not been formally approved by Health Canada for use in children and adolescents. When the benefits (e.g., reducing your symptoms) of using mirtazapine outweigh the potential risks (e.g., the side effects), many doctors may prescribe it to treat:

- Depression
- Depression associated with Bipolar Disorder

In some cases, mirtazapine has been used in anxiety disorders like post traumatic stress disorder and panic disorder.

Your doctor may be using this medication for another reason. If you are unclear why mirtazapine is being prescribed, please ask your doctor.



How does Mirtazapine work?

Mirtazapine is a "Noradrenergic and Specific Serotonergic Antidepressant". This means it increases the amount of certain chemicals in the brain called norepinephrine and serotonin. It is believed that some brain chemicals, such as norepinephrine and serotonin, are not working well in people who are depressed. The exact way that mirtazapine improves the symptoms of depression is still not fully known.

How well does Mirtazapine work in children and adolescents?

Testing of mirtazapine in children and adolescent research studies has been limited. In some studies of children and adolescents with depression, medications like mirtazapine have been found to help about **5-6 people out of 10**. Some of these studies also found that antidepressants were not better at treating the symptoms of depression than a placebo (an inactive pill that looks like medication). In general, depressed youth prescribed mirtazapine for 2-3 months will notice an improvement in their depressive symptoms (*such as improved mood, better sleep, more energy, and improved concentration*). Whenever possible, the addition of talk therapy (*such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy – CBT*) to these medications increases the potential for benefits.

How should Mirtazapine be taken?

Mirtazapine is available as a regular tablet and one that dissolves in your mouth (Remeron SolTab[®]). It is usually taken once a day with or without food.

This medication should be taken at the same time each day as directed by your doctor. Try to connect it with something you do each day (like eating supper or brushing your teeth) so that you don't forget.

If you are taking the dissolving tablets, follow these directions. Since this medication will be prescribed in a "blister pack" (not a bottle), you have to be careful about getting the medication out.

1. Use dry hands (wet hands can cause the medication to melt in your hands) to peel off the foil from the back of the blister before removing the tablet (rather than pushing the thin wafer through the foil).
2. Place the tablet on your child's tongue. The tablet will dissolve quickly and may be swallowed with or without water. Try not to chew it.

Usually, your doctor will start with a low dose. Then, this dose will be gradually increased over several days or weeks based on how you respond to it. You and your doctor can then discuss the best dosage to stay on based on how this medication is tolerated (how well the medication is working and how you are doing with side effects of the medication) and how well it helps decrease your symptoms.

When will this medication start working?

Mirtazapine must be taken for 3 to 6 weeks before you begin to feel better. Different symptoms start to improve at different rates. For example, improvements in sleep, appetite and energy may be seen within the first 2 weeks. Sometimes, others will notice improvements in you before you do. Full beneficial effects may take 4 to 8 weeks (or longer).

Since these medications take time to work, do not increase, decrease or stop them without discussing it with your doctor.

If you are not feeling better within 6 to 8 weeks, your doctor may recommend you take a different antidepressant. There is also a small possibility that your depressive symptoms may worsen or that you may experience some thoughts of self harm during the first couple months of taking this medication. If this happens, tell your doctor IMMEDIATELY.



How long do I have to take this medication?



This depends on the symptoms you have, how frequently they occur and how long you have had them. Most people need to take this medication for at least 6 months. This allows time for your symptoms to stabilize and for you to regain functioning. After this time, you and your doctor can discuss the benefits of continuing treatment.

If you have had several episodes of severe depression and you tolerate this medication well, you may be asked to take this medication for an indefinite amount of time. By continuing to take this medication, you significantly decrease the chance that you may have another episode of depression.

Do not stop taking this medication if you are feeling better without discussing it with your doctor.

Once you have started taking this medication, your doctor and you will need to monitor for both the beneficial and unwanted effects. Your doctor will likely check your progress and discuss changes in symptoms during the next 3 months to confirm that the medication is working properly and that possible side effects are avoided.

Tip: Use the Antidepressant Monitoring Form to help measure your progress on this medication.

Is Mirtazapine addictive?

No, mirtazapine is not addictive. You will not have "cravings" for it like some people do with nicotine or street drugs. If you and your doctor decide to stop using mirtazapine, your doctor can explain how to safely lower the dose so you don't feel any "flu-like" effects as your body adjusts to being without it.

What are the side effects of this medication and what should I do if I get them?

As with most medications, side effects may occur when taking mirtazapine. Most side effects are considered to be mild and temporary. Side effects may occur before any beneficial effects. It is possible to experience a side effect that you feel is serious or long lasting. If this occurs, speak to your doctor about ways to manage these side effects. Here are some of the more common side effects of taking this medication. In brackets are suggested ways to lessen these effects.

Common side effects

Should any of these side effects be too troublesome for you, please discuss them with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

- Drowsiness and tiredness (*take the dose at bedtime; this side effect gets better over time and improves as the dose of the medication is increased*)
- Dry mouth (*try chewing sugarless gum, sour candies, ice chips, or popsicles*)
- Constipation (*increase exercise, fluids, fruits and fibre*)
- Dizziness (*try getting up slowly from a sitting or lying down position*)
- Energized/agitated feelings (*avoid caffeine from colas and coffee*)
- Increase in hunger (*avoid high calorie foods*)
- Weight gain (*monitor your food intake, increase your exercise*)

Uncommon side effects (e.g., those that occur in less than 5% of patients)

Contact your doctor IMMEDIATELY if you have any of these side effects:

- Skin rash
- An uncomfortable sense of inner restlessness or agitation
- A switch in mood to an unusual state of excitement, irritability or happiness
- Thoughts of self harm, hostility or suicide



What precautions should my doctor and I be aware of when taking this medication?

Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you:

- have any allergies or have had bad reactions to other medications.
- take any other prescription or non-prescription medications. Some medications may interact with mirtazapine. Your doctor may need to change the doses of your medication(s) or monitor you carefully for side effects if you are taking other medications.
- have any changes in mood or thoughts of self harm.
- have a history of heart disease, seizures, kidney or liver disease.
- miss a period, become pregnant or are trying to become pregnant.

Mirtazapine can make you feel drowsy, dizzy or slowed down. These effects can be worsened if you drink alcohol. If you experience these temporary side effects, it is important to avoid operating heavy machinery or driving a car.

What should I do if I forget to take a dose?

If you take mirtazapine only at bedtime and you forget to take it, skip the missed dose and continue with your schedule the next day. Do NOT double your next dose. If you take it more than once a day, take the missed dose as soon as possible. However, if it is almost time for your next dose (e.g., within 4 hours), do not take the missed dose or double up on next dose. Instead, continue your regular dosing schedule.



What storage conditions are needed for this medication?

- Keep this medication in the original container, stored at room temperature away from moisture and heat (e.g., not in the bathroom).
- Keep this medication out of reach from children.