

# Escitalopram

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## What is this medication for?

Escitalopram belongs to a class of medications known as Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs). It is used to treat symptoms of depression (low mood) such as:

- Feeling sad
- Feeling hopeless or useless
- Feeling bad about yourself
- Thoughts of ending your life
- Poor sleep, energy or appetite.

It may also be used to treat symptoms of anxiety such as:

- Feeling constantly worried and unable to do anything about it
- Very fast heartbeat
- Tremors (shaking of body parts e.g. hands)
- Sweating
- Nervousness

This medication may be used for obsessive- compulsive disorders, eating disorders and other conditions. Check with your healthcare professional if you are unsure why you are given this medication.

## How should I take/use this medication?

- Follow the instructions on your medication label and take this medication as prescribed by your doctor.
- This medication should be taken with or after food.
- This medication needs to be taken regularly for a few weeks before you feel its full benefits. You should not stop taking this medication even if you do not feel better at the beginning. Continue to take this medication even after you feel better to prevent your symptoms from returning.
- Do check with your doctor on how long you will have to be on this medication.
- Do not stop taking your medication without checking with your healthcare professional. You may experience unpleasant effects such as dizziness, headache, difficulty sleeping, irritability, and nausea if you suddenly stop taking the medication on your own.

## What should I do if I forget to take/use this medication?

If you forget to take a dose, take it as soon as you remember. However, if it is more than half of the time to the next dose, skip the missed dose and take the next dose at your usual timing. Do not take two doses to make up for the missed dose.

## What precautions should I take?

Inform your healthcare professional if:

- You are allergic to this medication or any of the other ingredients of this medication
- You are pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or breastfeeding. If you are pregnant and/or breastfeeding, your doctor would have discussed the potential benefits and side-effects with you and should you have further questions or concerns, do consult your doctor.
- You have or have ever had:
  - Other drug allergies
  - Heart, kidney or liver disease
  - Medical conditions such as diabetes, seizures (fits), glaucoma (increased eye pressure), Parkinson's Disease, hyponatremia (low sodium in the blood) or bleeding problems
  - Other mental health conditions such as bipolar disorder or mania (abnormally high or excited mood)
  - Been taking other medications for low mood in the past 2 weeks.

Your mental condition may change unexpectedly, especially in the first few weeks of treatment and during dose changes. Check with your doctor immediately if you experience the following:

- New or increasing thoughts of harming yourself
- Worsening anxiety, restlessness, violent behaviour, or
- Other changes in mood or behaviour.

Be sure that your family or caregiver are also aware of the above symptoms so they can call your doctor if you are unable to seek treatment on your own.

## What are some side-effects that I need to seek medical advice immediately?

The symptoms of a drug allergy include one or more of the following:

- Swollen face/eyes/lips/tongue
- Difficulty in breathing
- Itchy skin rashes over your whole body

Very rarely (affect less than 1% of patients) this medication may cause:

- Unusual behaviour or thoughts of hurting yourself or others
- Seizures (fits)
- Unexplained fever, confusion, severe weakness, uncontrolled movements or twitching of the muscle
- Feelings of intense agitation or anxiety, restlessness or inability to sit still
- Talking, feeling, and acting with excitement that you cannot control

If you experience any of these symptoms, you should stop your medication and see your healthcare professional immediately.

## What are some other side-effects of this medication and what can you do about it?

The mentioned side effects generally affect up to 10% of patients.

- Nausea, vomiting or loss of appetite
  - Take the medication with or after food. Take small but frequent meals and avoid fatty or spicy food
- Tiredness or drowsiness
  - Avoid driving, or taking part in activities that requires concentration
  - Discuss with your doctor if you can take your medication at a different time of the day
- Dizziness
  - Get up slowly from a sitting or lying down position
- Difficulty sleeping
  - Discuss with your doctor if you can take the medication in the morning instead.
  - Avoid daytime naps, listen to relaxing music at bedtime.
  - Avoid overeating or drinking before bedtime. Avoid caffeinated drinks such as coffee and tea at least 8 hours before bedtime
- Diarrhoea
  - Drink plenty of water to replace the loss of fluids
- Dry mouth
  - Chew sugar-free gum, suck on sugar-free hard candies or ice chips, sip water regularly
- Mild nervousness, trembling or increased sweating
  - Nervousness may usually occur at the start of treatment but will improve over time
- Headache, decreased sexual drive or ability
  - Speak to your doctor if any of these affect your daily life

Most of the side effects listed here will improve with time. Speak with your doctor if they continue, get worse or are affecting your daily life.

## What food or medication should I avoid when I take this medication?

Avoid drinking alcohol while taking this medication as it may make you feel very drowsy and can worsen symptoms of depression or increase anxiety.

This medication may interact with other medications. If you intend to take any over the counter medication, supplements such as St John's Wort, herbal remedy or traditional Chinese medicine, consult your doctor or healthcare professional first to confirm that it is safe to take with this medication.

## How should I store this medication?

Store in a cool and dry place, away from direct sunlight. Keep this medication away from children.

## How should I throw away this medication safely?

Pack this medication into a trash bag and seal it tightly before throwing into the rubbish chute or bin.

### Disclaimers

If you take more than the recommended dose, please seek medical advice immediately. The information provided on this page does not replace information from your healthcare professional. Please consult your healthcare professional for more information.

*This article is jointly developed by members of the National Medication Information workgroup. The workgroup consists of cluster partners (National Healthcare Group, National University Health System and SingHealth), community pharmacies (Guardian, Unity and Watsons), Pharmaceutical Society of Singapore and Ministry of Health.*

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