

Information Sheet for Patients using Flunarizine for Migraine Prophylaxis

What is Flunarizine?

Flunarizine is one of a group of medicines known as calcium channel blockers, and was initially used to improve blood flow. It was later used to treat dizziness and vertigo, and to prevent migraine.

Can I get Flunarizine from my local Pharmacist?

Although this medication is widely used by headache specialists and is licensed in many countries including Ireland for the prevention of migraine, Flunarizine is not marketed or licensed in the UK. It is being recommended as there is no suitable licensed alternative. Your local Pharmacist will be able to supply it to you but you will need a prescription for it.

How should I take Flunarizine?

Flunarizine is made in 5mg and 10mg capsules. The starting dose is 5mg to be taken at night-time if you are over 65 years. Under 65 years can start on 10 mg at night time. Once control has been achieved you should either drop down to a lower dose or there should be 2 successive drug-free days each week. The Headache Clinic will review you after 6 months of treatment where we may advise Flunarizine to be stopped and only re-started if the problem returns.

How long do I need to take Flunarizine for?

Your tablets may not start to work for eight weeks, so you should keep taking them for this length of time. If the medicine seems effective, you should keep taking the tablets for at least six months before discussing a reduction with your doctor. If you continue after eight weeks you should have two days a week break from the medication.

What are the side effects?

The main side effects of Flunarizine are:

- tiredness, drowsiness
- weight gain,
- symptoms of depression
- tremors (shaking) or muscle stiffness

What do I do if I get side effects?

- If you feel tired you should not drive or operate machinery. Tiredness often occurs in the first few weeks of treatment and usually disappears after this. Some patients have a second wave of tiredness after several weeks or months. If this happens, you can either try a lower dose or take Flunarizine on alternate days.
- Weight gain is caused by an increase in appetite and can be avoided by keeping to your usual diet.
- If you feel depressed, stop taking Flunarizine. If you have not recovered within one month, you should take advice from your GP about treatment of depression.
- Symptoms of tremors or muscle stiffness usually disappear when Flunarizine is stopped.

Can I drink alcohol if I am taking Flunarizine?

Alcohol may increase the risk of tiredness and drowsiness with Flunarizine. If you do feel tired or drowsy whilst taking Flunarizine, you should avoid alcoholic drinks.

Who cannot take Flunarizine?

You must not take Flunarizine:

- if you suffer from Parkinson's Disease
- if you have a strong family history of Parkinson's Disease
- if you suffer from current depression
- if you have suffered from significant depression in the past
- if you have an allergy to Flunarizine or any other ingredients in the capsules.

Pregnancy and breast-feeding:

Flunarizine is not recommended during pregnancy or whilst breastfeeding. You should not take Flunarizine if you are pregnant, planning a pregnancy or breastfeeding.

Recommendation from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence

NICE has made a statement about Flunarizine. This can be found by googling "NICE and Flunarizine"

This leaflet is intended to provide a brief overview of aspects of this treatment protocol. It is not intended as a substitute for the comprehensive 'product information' leaflet found inside all boxes of medication. The 'product information' leaflet should always be read before taking medication

Your prescribing doctor will discuss the risks and benefits of the medication as it relates to you and answer any further questions you may have.