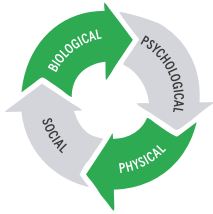


Clozapine



There is a lot of money available for research on medications, some of it from pharmaceutical companies and some from independent researchers who are not sponsored by pharmaceutical companies, so there is a lot of research into medications. Remember, more thumbs up just means that more people have done research that shows that this approach does work.

What is it?

Clozapine is a medicine that's licensed for people who are 16 years and older. It isn't offered the first time someone has unusual distressing experiences, because it's for people who've tried at least two other medicines and found that they don't work. It is available in syrup and tablets. The normal daily amount is 200–400mg a day up to a maximum of 900mg a day.

What does it aim to do?

Clozapine can reduce unusual and distressing thoughts and experiences (hearing and seeing things or having strong upsetting beliefs). It is usually only offered to people when they've already had two other medicines that haven't worked. This is because it needs regular monitoring with blood tests.

Does it work?

Clozapine is a bit different from the other medicines described in this booklet. Studies have found that Clozapine is better at reducing unusual distressing experiences and the risk of becoming unwell again, than other medicines, for people who found that the other medicines don't work.

At least one out of every three people who didn't find other medicines helpful will find that Clozapine does help with their unusual distressing experiences.

What are the side-effects of Clozapine?

Clozapine is also different from the other medicines in this booklet in its side-effects. Like most medicines, Clozapine has side-effects. An important common (1 in 100 people) side-effect of Clozapine is that it can sometimes reduce your white blood cells (the ones that fight disease!).

If your white blood cells get too low this can be life-threatening, so if you take Clozapine you need to have your blood checked regularly at a doctor's surgery or clinic, to make sure everything is OK. Any change in your white blood cells happens really slowly, so if you start taking Clozapine you will have blood tests first weekly, then fortnightly, then monthly.

The blood tests check for changes in your blood cells. A green result means everything's fine, an amber result means you'll need extra blood tests to check on things and a red result means there are signs that your white blood cells have got too low for the time being and you need to stop taking Clozapine.

The longer you are taking Clozapine the less often you will have blood tests because most problems with your blood happen in the first 18 weeks.

If you start or stop smoking, you may need more or less Clozapine, so do let your doctor know. You also need to let your doctor, pharmacist or care coordinator know if you stop taking Clozapine, because stopping for more than two days and then starting again on the same amount can be dangerous.

Very common side-effects of Clozapine include tiredness and too much saliva (spit in the mouth), dizziness, a fast heart rate and not being able to poo, especially when first taking it, but fewer movement related side-effects, than with other medicines.

Less common side-effects (between 1 in 10 and 1 in 100 people) include feeling more hungry and putting on weight, movement problems, blurred vision, dry mouth, low blood pressure, fainting, headaches, slurred speech, fits, heart and liver changes (experienced as sickness, appetite loss and jaundice) and problems with controlling your body temperature and with needing the toilet a lot.

How can I get this treatment?

Clozapine can only be prescribed by your mental health team. You can't buy it over the counter or get it from your GP.

✓ Main pro

When people have found two or more other medicines haven't been helpful for them, Clozapine may well be helpful. This can be life-changing!

✗ Main con

Clozapine can reduce white blood cells (about 1 in 100 people may get this), which can have serious health consequences. People who take Clozapine need to have their white blood cell count checked regularly. By having regular blood tests Clozapine is made safe to use.

“ Clozapine helps with my anxiety. ”

Daniel, 27

“ Clozapine is an important medicine for those people suffering from persistent and treatment resistant psychosis. Properly managed, the benefits far outweigh the risks.

Clozapine should not be considered as a 'last chance saloon' for those with such treatment resistance, as early use, in the right individuals, can be life-changing. ”

Dr Rick Fraser, EIP Consultant Psychiatrist