



*Better
Together*

Patient information

Nitrates

Pharmacy and Cardiology Directorate

‘Nitrates’ is the name given to a group of medicines.

Your nitrate is called:

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Why has my doctor given me a nitrate and what are the benefits?

Nitrates can be used for various reasons. They are often used to treat the chest pain or discomfort of angina either as glyceryl trinitrate tablets or spray (GTN), or to prevent angina by taking a regular tablet or using patches.

Check with your doctor if you are still not sure why you need a nitrate.

How do they work?

Nitrates work by opening up the blood vessels that lead to the heart. This increases the blood supply to the heart and prevents or stops chest pain. GTN tablets or spray work very quickly to reduce episodes of angina, whereas longer-acting tablets, such as isosorbide mononitrate, work steadily to prevent angina occurring.

How should I take my nitrate?

Always follow the instructions on the label.

Do not stop taking this medicine unless your doctor tells you to.

Sit down before you take your GTN spray or tablets.

You must put GTN tablets under your tongue and allow them to dissolve. GTN tablets only keep for eight weeks after you open the bottle so make a note of the date you opened the bottle and get a new supply eight weeks after that.

If you use the spray, you should spray one or two puffs under your tongue.

If, after five minutes, your chest discomfort or pain has not gone, put another tablet, or spray another dose, under your tongue.

If you have taken three tablets (or two puffs of spray on three occasions) in less than 15 minutes and the discomfort or pain has not gone, dial 999 to call an ambulance.

You should take nitrates used to prevent angina according to the instructions on the label. However, if you have to take your nitrate more than once a day, it is important that you do not take the last dose later than tea-time as it will not work properly.

If you begin to use your GTN tablets or spray more frequently, please contact your doctor as this may be a sign that your angina is becoming less well controlled.

You should carry GTN tablets or spray with you at all times. You can use them before you do any exercise to prevent angina. You can buy GTN from your pharmacy without a prescription.

What should I do if I miss a dose? (For regular nitrates only)

Take it as soon as you remember. If it is nearly time for the next dose, do not take the one you missed. Take the next dose at the usual time. Do not double the next dose.

What are the risks of nitrates?

There are risks and benefits of taking all drugs however your doctor will discuss why there are more benefits than risks for you taking nitrates. There are some side effects to all drugs.

What are the side effects of nitrates?

All medicines have side effects. Not everybody will experience side effects.

Some people may experience:

- Headaches
- Flushing
- Dizziness

Side effects such as headaches may be troublesome while you are using the GTN tablets or spray. To reduce these, spit out or swallow any tablets that are left in your mouth as soon as your chest pain has gone. If you use the spray you can rinse your mouth with water.

With the longer-acting nitrates, side effects such as headaches will disappear with time as your body adjusts to the medication.

Can I take other medicines while taking nitrates?

Some other medicines may affect how nitrates work. It is important that you check with your doctor or pharmacist before you take any other medicines, including ones that you buy.

Some medicines used for erectile dysfunction must not be used if you are on a nitrate because they can cause a rapid fall in your blood pressure. The most common ones are sildenafil (viagra), tadalafil (cialis) and vardenafil (levitra). However, please check with your doctor.

Are there any alternative treatments available?

There is no alternative to GTN tablets or spray however if you suffer with headaches with the spray you may benefit from the 300mcg tablet as you can remove the tablet from under your tongue once your angina has gone to prevent any more of the drug being absorbed by your body.

There are various different drugs available to treat angina however, if your doctor has prescribed a daily nitrate tablet for you, it may be the most appropriate tablet. If you have any side effects, please discuss this with your doctor.

What will happen if I decide not to take the nitrate?

If you decide not to have the tablet you will not have the benefits and the nitrates are to control your symptoms of angina. You must discuss this with your doctor if you are taking a daily nitrate tablet as they may be able to prescribe an alternative.

This leaflet is not a substitute for any advice that your doctor, nurse or pharmacist may give you.

You can get more detailed information from the manufacturer's information leaflet.

Further Information

**Further information on this medicine is available from the Medicines Information Department of the Royal Liverpool University Hospital
Telephone number: 0151 706 2096
Text phone number 18001 0151 2096**

**NHS website
www.nhs.uk**

**NHS Direct: 0845 46 47
For free advice and information on any health matter, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.**

**Author: Pharmacy and Cardiology Directorates
Review Date: December 2016**

All Trust approved information is available on request in alternative formats, including other languages, easy read, large print, audio, Braille, moon and electronically.

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