

Oxcarbazepine for Trigeminal Neuralgia

A guide for patients

What is Oxcarbazepine?

Oxcarbazepine (brand name: Trileptal) is a medication commonly used to treat nerve pain, including trigeminal neuralgia — a condition that causes sudden, sharp facial pain. It works by calming overactive nerves that may be misfiring and sending inappropriate pain signals when they shouldn't. It works via a similar mechanism to carbamazepine (Tegretol) and generally achieves comparable effectiveness, albeit with reduced side effects and enhanced tolerability, though is more expensive.

How It Works

Oxcarbazepine affects the way nerves send electrical signals in the brain. It blocks certain "sodium channels" that nerves use to fire rapidly. In trigeminal neuralgia, this helps stop the pain signals from being sent inappropriately. Think of it as turning down the "volume" on a faulty wire that's causing a short-circuit.

Typical Dosing and Escalation

- Starting dose: Usually 150 to 300 mg once or twice a day, depending on your age, health, and other medications.
- Tablet size: 150 mg, 300 mg and 600 mg tablets
- Increasing the dose: Your doctor will gradually increase the dose every 5 to 7 days to help your body adjust and reduce side effects.
- Target dose: Often ranges from 600 mg to 1800 mg per day, split into two doses (morning and evening).
- Each dose is converted to an active metabolite that has a half-life of nine hours and is excreted in your urine. If you have impaired kidney function, you may need a reduced dose.
- Always follow your doctor's instructions. Never change the dose or stop the medication without medical advice.

Common Side Effects

Most people tolerate oxcarbazepine well, but some may experience:

- Fatigue or drowsiness
- Dizziness, balance or coordination issues
- Nausea / upset stomach and vomiting
- Headache

- Low sodium levels (may cause confusion, fatigue, or headaches — your GP will check this with blood tests). Typically, this occurs in the first three months of usage, though may occur after, and is more common if you have impaired kidney function, taking medications such as diuretics (fluid tablets) or NSAIDs (anti-inflammatory tablets).
- Rarely, some people may develop a rash or allergic reaction. Contact your doctor immediately if you notice a rash, facial swelling, or trouble breathing. If you have a hypersensitivity reaction to carbamazepine, there is a 25-30% chance this will also occur with oxcarbazepine.
- Oxcarbazepine may be teratogenic (Category C) and should be avoided in pregnancy.

Important Tips

- Take with food to help prevent nausea.
- Stay hydrated, especially if you're on a higher dose.
- Let your doctor know about all medications or supplements you're taking.
- Do not drive or operate heavy machinery until you know how the medication affects you.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember — but skip it if it's almost time for the next one.

Final Word

Oxcarbazepine is often effective in reducing or even eliminating trigeminal neuralgia pain — sometimes giving people their lives back. The key is to start low, go slow, and stay in touch with your care team about how you're feeling.

If you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to reach out.