Memory Assessment Service
Brighton & Hove

Information for people taking Rivastigmine

(say: river-stig-mean)

What is rivastigmine used for?

- Rivastigmine (also called Exelon®) is mainly used to help treat the symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease (dementia) and also to help dementia in Parkinson's Disease
- It is known as an anticholinesterase or an 'acetylcholinesterase inhibitor'
- Rivastigmine is available as capsules, liquid and skin patches (see a separate patch leaflet).

What is the usual dose of rivastigmine?

- The usual dose of rivastigmine capsules is 3- 6mg twice a day
- The patches normally start at 4.6mg/24hrs, going up to 13.3mg/24hrs.

How should I take rivastigmine?

- Swallow the capsules with water
- For the liquid, use a medicine spoon, dropper or oral syringe
- Use it carefully to make sure you measure the correct amount
- You must follow the instructions for the patches carefully (there is a separate leaflet for the patches).

When should I take rivastigmine?

- If the instructions say to take it once a day this is usually best in the morning.
- Taking rivastigmine at mealtimes may make it easier for you to remember as it can be taken with or after food.

How long will rivastigmine take to work?

- Rivastigmine usually starts to work in a couple of weeks or so.

How long will I need to keep taking rivastigmine?

- You may need to take it for the rest of your life.

Is rivastigmine addictive and can I stop taking it suddenly?

- Rivastigmine is not addictive
- There are no known problems with stopping rivastigmine suddenly (e.g. before surgery)
- However, if you stop, the benefits are then lost.
- There might be a rapid decline down to where you would have been without the rivastigmine. This may occur even days or weeks after rivastigmine has been stopped
- When the time comes, you should stop rivastigmine by a gradual reduction in the dose over several weeks. You should discuss this fully with your prescriber, doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

What should I do if I forget to take a dose of rivastigmine at the right time?

- Start again as soon as you remember if within about 12 hours.
- After this just take the next dose as normal.
- Do not try to catch up by taking two doses at once as you may get more side-effects.

Will I need any blood or other tests if I am taking rivastigmine?

- You should not need a blood test while you are taking rivastigmine.

Can I drive or cycle while I am taking rivastigmine?

- Until you know how rivastigmine affects you, do not drive or operate machinery.
- You should be careful as it may slow down your reaction times.

Can I drink alcohol while I am taking rivastigmine?

- If you drink alcohol while taking rivastigmine it may make you feel a little more sleepy.

Will rivastigmine affect my other medication?

Rivastigmine has very few possible interactions with other medicines. The main ones include:

- Rivastigmine can increase the effect of suxamethonium (a muscle relaxant) or betablockers (e.g. propranolol, atenolol; used to treat fast heart rate and high blood pressure)

What sort of side-effects might I get if I am taking rivastigmine?

This table shows some of the most common side effects and any you might need to take action on.
You must also see the maker's Patient Information Leaflet for the full list of possible side effects but do not be worried by this. Some people get no side effects at all.

Some side effects are the brain getting used to a medicine and these usually wear off in a few days or weeks. **Transient gastric side effects are common**, for example nausea, reduced appetite or loose stools, in the first week or two but should wear off completely over a few days.

It is important to tell your GP quickly if you have an unexplained fall or frequent falls following starting on rivastigmine as your medication may need to be stopped.

If you have side effects or concerns regarding rivastigmine you should contact your pharmacist or GP for advice. None of the clinicians in MAS work for the service every day so we are unable to respond to medication queries

COMMON (fewer than about 1 in 10 people might get these)	
Headache When your head is painful and pounding.	Ask your pharmacist if it is safe to take paracetamol with any other medicines you are taking.
Loss of appetite Not feeling hungry.	You may lose weight. If this is a problem, contact your GP or pharmacist for advice.
Dizziness Feeling light-headed and faint.	Don't stand up too quickly. Try and lie or sit down if you feel it coming on. A change in dose may help. Discuss this with your GP.
Nausea and vomiting Feeling sick and being sick.	Take the dose with or after food. If it is bad, contact your GP. It may be possible to adjust your dose.
Diarrhoea Going to the toilet more than usual.	Passing loose, watery stools. Drink plenty of water. Get advice from your pharmacist. If it lasts for more than a day, contact your GP.
Sleep disturbances You can't sleep very well and may have nightmares.	If you feel like this for more than a week after starting rivastigmine, tell your GP. Sometimes changing the time of day you take your dose can help.

RARE but important (can be serious if not dealt with quickly)	
Seizures Having a fit or convulsion.	Stop taking rivastigmine and contact your doctor immediately.

The small print: This leaflet is to help you understand about your medicine. You must also read the manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet (PIL). You may find more on the internet but beware as internet-based information is not always accurate. Do not share medicines with anyone else. The 'Handy charts' will help you compare the main medicines for each condition, how they work and their side effects. Go to our website for fuller answers to these and many other questions.

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