

**Sertraline** (ser' tra leen)  
Last revised: March 1, 2009.



### **Important Warning:**

A small number of children, teenagers, and young adults (up to 24 years of age) who took antidepressants ('mood elevators') such as sertraline during clinical studies became suicidal (thinking about harming or killing oneself or planning or trying to do so). Children, teenagers, and young adults who take antidepressants to treat depression or other mental illnesses may be more likely to become suicidal than children, teenagers, and young adults who do not take antidepressants to treat these conditions. However, experts are not sure about how great this risk is and how much it should be considered in deciding whether a child or teenager should take an antidepressant.

You should know that your mental health may change in unexpected ways when you take sertraline or other antidepressants even if you are an adult over 24 years of age. You may become suicidal, especially at the beginning of your treatment and any time that your dose is increased or decreased. You, your family, or your caregiver should call your doctor right away if you experience any of the following symptoms: new or worsening depression; thinking about harming or killing yourself, or planning or trying to do so; extreme worry; agitation; panic attacks; difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep; aggressive behavior; irritability; acting without thinking; severe restlessness; and frenzied abnormal excitement. Be sure that your family or caregiver knows which symptoms may be serious so they can call the doctor if you are unable to seek treatment on your own.

Your healthcare provider will want to see you often while you are taking sertraline, especially at the beginning of your treatment. Be sure to keep all appointments for office visits with your doctor.

The doctor or pharmacist will give you the manufacturer's patient information sheet (Medication Guide) when you begin treatment with sertraline. Read the information carefully and ask your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions. You also can obtain the Medication Guide from the FDA website: <http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/DrugSafety/InformationbyDrugClass/UCM096273>.

No matter what your age, before you take an antidepressant, you, your parent, or your caregiver should talk to your doctor about the risks and benefits of treating your condition with an antidepressant or with other treatments. You should also talk about the risks and benefits of not treating your condition. You should know that having depression or another mental illness greatly increases the risk that you will become

suicidal. This risk is higher if you or anyone in your family has or has ever had bipolar disorder (mood that changes from depressed to abnormally excited) or mania (frenzied, abnormally excited mood) or has thought about or attempted suicide. Talk to your doctor about your condition, symptoms, and personal and family medical history. You and your doctor will decide what type of treatment is right for you.

## Why is this medication prescribed?

Sertraline is used to treat depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder (bothersome thoughts that won't go away and the need to perform certain actions over and over), panic attacks (sudden, unexpected attacks of extreme fear and worry about these attacks), posttraumatic stress disorder (disturbing psychological symptoms that develop after a frightening experience), and social anxiety disorder (extreme fear of interacting with others or performing in front of others that interferes with normal life). It is also used to relieve the symptoms of premenstrual dysphoric disorder, including mood swings, irritability, bloating, and breast tenderness. Sertraline is in a class of antidepressants called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). It works by increasing the amounts of serotonin, a natural substance in the brain that helps maintain mental balance.

## How should this medicine be used?

Sertraline comes as a tablet and a concentrate (liquid) to take by mouth. It is usually taken once daily in the morning or evening. To treat premenstrual dysphoric disorder, sertraline is taken once a day, either every day of the month or on certain days of the month. Take sertraline at around the same time every day. Follow the directions on your prescription label carefully, and ask your doctor or pharmacist to explain any part you do not understand. Take sertraline exactly as directed. Do not take more or less of it or take it more often than prescribed by your doctor.

Sertraline concentrate must be diluted before use. Immediately before taking it, use the provided dropper to remove the amount of concentrate your doctor has told you to take. Mix the concentrate with 4 ounces (1/2 cup [120 milliliters]) of water, ginger ale, lemon or lime soda, lemonade, or orange juice. Do not mix the concentrate with any liquids other than the ones listed. Drink immediately.

Your doctor may start you on a low dose of sertraline and gradually increase your dose, not more than once a week.

It may take a few weeks or longer before you feel the full benefit of sertraline. Continue to take sertraline even if you feel well. Do not stop taking sertraline without talking to your doctor.

## Other uses for this medicine

Sertraline is also used sometimes to treat headaches and sexual problems. Talk to your doctor about the possible risks of using this medication for your condition.

This medication may be prescribed for other uses; ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information.

## What special precautions should I follow?

Before taking sertraline,

- tell your doctor and pharmacist if you are allergic to sertraline or any other medications. Before taking sertraline liquid concentrate, tell your doctor if you are allergic to latex.
- tell your doctor if you are taking monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitors, including isocarboxazid (Marplan), phenelzine (Nardil), selegiline (Eldepryl, Emsam, Zelapar), and tranylcypromine (Parnate), or have stopped taking them within the past 2 weeks, or if you are taking pimozide (Orap). Your doctor will probably tell you not to take sertraline. If you stop taking sertraline, you should wait at least 2 weeks before you start to take an MAO inhibitor.
- do not take disulfiram (Antabuse) while taking sertraline concentrate.
- tell your doctor and pharmacist what other prescription and nonprescription medications, vitamins, nutritional supplements, and herbal products you are taking or plan to take. Be sure to mention any of the following: anticoagulants ('blood thinners') such as warfarin (Coumadin); antidepressants ('mood elevators') such as amitriptyline (Elavil), amoxapine (Asendin), clomipramine (Anafranil), desipramine (Norpramin), doxepin (Adapin, Sinequan), imipramine (Tofranil), nortriptyline (Aventyl, Pamelor), protriptyline (Vivactil), and trimipramine (Surmontil); aspirin and other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) and naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn); cimetidine (Tagamet); diazepam (Valium); digoxin (Lanoxin); lithium (Eskalith, Lithobid); medications for anxiety, mental illness, Parkinson's disease, and seizures; medications for irregular heartbeat such as flecainide (Tambocor) and propafenone (Rythmol); oral medications for diabetes such as tolbutamide (Orinase); medications for migraine headaches such as almotriptan (Axert), eletriptan (Relpax), frovatriptan (Frova), naratriptan (Amerge), rizatriptan (Maxalt), sumatriptan (Imitrex), and zolmitriptan (Zomig); sedatives; sibutramine (Meridia); sleeping pills; and tranquilizers. Your doctor may need to change the doses of your medications or monitor you carefully for side effects.
- tell your doctor if you have recently had a heart attack and if you have or have ever had seizures or liver or heart disease.
- tell your doctor if you are pregnant, plan to become pregnant, or are breast-feeding. If you become pregnant while taking sertraline, call your doctor.
- you should know that sertraline may make you drowsy. Do not drive a car or operate machinery until you know how this medication affects you.
- ask your doctor about the safe use of alcoholic beverages while you are taking sertraline.

## What special dietary instructions should I follow?

Unless your doctor tells you otherwise, continue your normal diet.

## What should I do if I forget a dose?

Take the missed dose as soon as you remember it. However, if it is almost time for the next dose, skip the missed dose and continue your regular dosing schedule. Do not take a double dose to make up for a missed one.

## What side effects can this medication cause?

Sertraline may cause side effects. Tell your doctor if any of these symptoms are severe or do not go away:

- nausea
- diarrhea
- constipation
- vomiting
- dry mouth
- gas or bloating
- loss of appetite
- weight changes
- drowsiness
- dizziness
- excessive tiredness
- headache
- pain, burning, or tingling in the hands or feet
- nervousness
- uncontrollable shaking of a part of the body
- sore throat
- changes in sex drive or ability
- excessive sweating

Some side effects can be serious. If you experience any of the following symptoms or those listed in the IMPORTANT WARNING section, call your doctor immediately:

- blurred vision
- seizures
- fever, sweating, confusion, fast or irregular heartbeat, and severe muscle stiffness
- abnormal bleeding or bruising
- hallucinating (seeing things or hearing voices that do not exist)

Sertraline may cause other side effects. Call your doctor if you have any unusual problems while taking this medication.

If you experience a serious side effect, you or your doctor may send a report to the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) MedWatch Adverse Event Reporting program online [at <http://www.fda.gov/Safety/MedWatch>] or by phone [1-800-332-1088].

### **What storage conditions are needed for this medicine?**

Keep this medication in the container it came in, tightly closed, and out of reach of children. Store it at room temperature and away from excess heat and moisture (not in the bathroom). Throw away any medication that is outdated or no longer needed. Talk to your pharmacist about the proper disposal of your medication.

### **In case of emergency/overdose**

In case of overdose, call your local poison control center at 1-800-222-1222. If the victim has collapsed or is not breathing, call local emergency services at 911.

Symptoms of overdose may include:

- hair loss

- changes in sex drive or ability
- drowsiness
- excessive tiredness
- difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
- diarrhea
- vomiting
- rapid, pounding, or irregular heartbeat
- nausea
- dizziness
- excitement
- uncontrollable shaking of a part of the body
- seizures
- hallucinating (hearing voices or seeing things that do not exist)
- unconsciousness
- fainting

## What other information should I know?

Keep all appointments with your doctor.

Do not let anyone else take your medication. Ask your pharmacist any questions you have about refilling your prescription.

It is important for you to keep a written list of all of the prescription and nonprescription (over-the-counter) medicines you are taking, as well as any products such as vitamins, minerals, or other dietary supplements. You should bring this list with you each time you visit a doctor or if you are admitted to a hospital. It is also important information to carry with you in case of emergencies.



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**The following brand names are from RxNorm,  
a standardized nomenclature for clinical  
drugs produced by the National Library of  
Medicine:**

### Brand names

- Zoloft