



## **Tricyclic Medications (i.e. Elavil/ amitriptylline, Pamelor/nortriptylline, Tofranil/imipramine, and many others)**

### **General Information**

The medication your doctor has prescribed is called a tricyclic drug. Many people are familiar with these drugs because they were originally manufactured for the treatment of depression. However, like many drugs, tricyclics have more than one use. Neurologists have found these drugs useful in the treatment of chronic pain due to a number of conditions such as back disorders, headaches, peripheral neuropathy (i.e burning feet), and shingles among others. Just because your doctor feels these medications may be right for you, does not necessarily mean that he thinks you are depressed (although many patients with chronic pain do have some degree of depression).

### **What to Know About These Medications**

Unlike most pain medications, tricyclics are not effective immediately. You will not see an immediate effect from these drugs. It usually takes anywhere from 4-6 weeks before your doctor will know if a particular dosage is going to work. Almost all patients will be started at a very low dose to avoid a chance of side effects. Your doctor will then increase the dose every couple of weeks until you improve or until you experience side effects. **It is very important that you take this medication every day.** If you miss a dose, the level of the medication in your body will fall and lose its effect. Then you will have to start all over again.

### **Side Effects to Watch For**

The most common side effect is sedation. Sometimes this is beneficial. Your doctor may choose a less sedating drug based upon your situation. Other potential side effects include urinary retention (in patients with prostate enlargement). Heart rhythm disturbance, worsening of glaucoma, confusion (in elderly patients), or skin rash occur rarely. Occasionally, you may be more sensitive to sunlight. Avoid tanning beds and use plenty of sunscreen. If any problems occur while taking these drugs, call your doctor immediately. While most people find that they sleep better while taking tricyclics, an occasional patient may experience vivid dreams.