

Pristiq (desvenlafaxine)

Pristiq is a medication most rarely used for depression or to treat anxiety. It belongs to a class of drugs called SNRIs (Serotonin-Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors). An educational handout about SNRIs is also available.

Patients are often started on drugs with limited discussion about intended benefits or the likely or potential side effects. This document is intended to augment information that may have already been provided. If you have questions, please ask the primary provider.

When used to treat depression or anxiety, improvement would be expected in weeks to months, not days. Conversely, if there is no benefit in several months, there is little chance that it will ever work. There is no proven additional benefit at doses above 50 milligrams daily. It can be given as a single daily dose or is often used every other day in seniors as it lasts a long time in the body. It may interfere with normal sleep patterns and may cause either insomnia or somnolence, so the time of day to take it may vary from person to person.

Potential adverse effects are unusual, but they do happen. Both “Serious” reactions can occur as well as others that are more “Common”. Lists like this are available from many sources and are not always identical. There is no intent to list every possible side effect or to address the potential interactions that may occur with concomitant use with other drugs.

Potential Serious Reactions

Worsening Depression
Mania / Manic Episodes
Serotonin Syndrome
Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome
(mental change, rigid muscles, fever, fast heart rate, sweating, fast breathing)
Seizures

Extrapyramidal Symptoms
(restless, Parkinsons, muscle contractions)
High Blood Pressure
Heart Attack or Angina
Fast Heart Rate
Hyponatremia (Low Sodium)
SIADH (Impaired water excretion)
Abnormal / Excess Bleeding

Glaucoma
Interstitial Lung Disease
(scarring of lung tissue)
Pneumonia (Eosinophilic)
Anaphylaxis / Allergic Reactions
Withdrawal Symptoms
(when abruptly discontinued)

Common Side Effects

Nausea / Vomiting
Headache
Cracked Lips
Excessive Sweating
Insomnia or Somnolence
Diarrhea
Muscle Loss / Weakness
Decreased Appetite / Weight Loss
Fatigue

Tremors
Anxiety / Nervousness
Dilated Pupils
Blurred Vision
Chills
Abnormal Dreams
Fast Heart Rate / Palpitations
Abnormal sensations in skin

Irritability
High Blood Pressure
Increased Cholesterol
Urinary Problems
Ringing in the ears
Rash
Impaired Sense of Taste
Falls / Fractures

More educational materials and information are available on the FDA’s website at:

<http://www.fda.gov/downloads/Drugs/DrugSafety/ucm088579.pdf>

When a resident’s depressive or anxious symptoms do not respond favorably after several months of use or when side effects attributable to the medication occur, the facility and providers may taper the medication (slowly reduce the dose) to see if it can be discontinued.