

Serotonin Syndrome – Patient Information Leaflet

What is serotonin?

Serotonin is a natural chemical in your body. It helps regulate mood, sleep, digestion, and other important functions.

What is serotonin syndrome?

Serotonin syndrome happens when there is too much serotonin in the body. This can sometimes occur as a side effect of certain medicines, especially if two or more are taken together. It can range from mild to severe. Most cases are mild, but in rare situations it can be life-threatening.

Causes

Serotonin syndrome may occur if:

- You start a new medication that affects serotonin.
- The dose of your medication is increased.
- You take more than one medicine that boosts serotonin.

Medicines linked with serotonin syndrome include:

- Antidepressants (SSRIs, SNRIs, MAOIs, tricyclics)
- Migraine medications (triptans)
- Pain medications (tramadol, fentanyl)
- Herbal remedies (St John's Wort, cough syrups with dextromethorphan)
- Recreational drugs (MDMA/ecstasy, cocaine, LSD)

Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms can appear within hours of taking medication.

Mild:

- Shivering, sweating
- Fast heartbeat
- Dilated pupils
- Agitation, restlessness, or confusion
- Diarrhoea

Moderate to Severe:

- High fever
- Muscle stiffness, twitching, or jerks
- Tremors or loss of coordination
- Seizures
- Unconsciousness

When to Seek Help

- Call 999 or go to A&E; immediately if you experience severe symptoms such as high fever, seizures, irregular heartbeat, or loss of consciousness.
- Contact your doctor urgently if you develop milder symptoms after starting or changing a medicine.

■■ Do not stop medication suddenly unless advised by your doctor – this can sometimes make things worse.

Treatment

Treatment depends on the severity:

- Stopping the medicine causing the problem
- Supportive care (e.g., fluids, oxygen, monitoring)
- In hospital, you may be given medicines to help reduce symptoms and calm the body.

Prevention

- Always tell your doctor or pharmacist about all medicines, supplements, or herbal remedies you are taking.
- Do not increase doses or combine medicines without medical advice.
- Report any unusual symptoms soon after starting or changing medication.

Key Message: Serotonin syndrome is rare, but it can be serious. Be aware of the symptoms, act quickly if they appear, and always seek medical advice before changing your medicines.