Medication can play a significant role in your recovery and wellbeing along with social, emotional, physical, occupational and spiritual health.

Clozapine is an atypical antipsychotic medication that can help control schizophrenia type symptoms and improve your quality of life.

What do I need to know about taking clozapine, also known as Clozaril®?

The Big Issue – Side Effects

It is important to discuss side effects at each visit with your doctor, clozapine nurse/coordinator. Some of the side effects may decrease over time and others can be managed.

Some common side effects include:
- Sedation, drowsiness
- Dizziness
- Fast heart rate
- Increase in saliva – dribbling (mostly at night)
- Constipation
- Increase in weight

Less common side effects include:
- Fever; sore throat or flu like symptoms
- Seizure
- Chest pain; shortness of breath
- Urinary incontinence (mostly at night)

If you experience any of the less common side effects, or increased dizziness or sedation, sudden prolonged increase in heart rate or irregular heart rate, or severe constipation, tell your doctor immediately and/or go to the hospital Emergency Department.

You can ask your Clozapine Coordinator for a Clozapine Care card that you can use to show emergency staff in case they don’t understand.

**WARNING:** the following can affect clozapine and must be discussed with your doctor, clozapine nurse/coordinator if you make changes to:

- Smoking: affects clozapine levels. If you stop, start, increase or decrease smoking this must be planned as your dose may need to be changed.
- Caffeine: (coffee, tea, cola, energy and diet drinks) can also affect clozapine levels. If you make any changes to your caffeine your dose may need to be changed.
- Alcohol and Illicit Drugs: (street, non-prescribed) can interact with clozapine and increase risks to your health.
- Other prescribed and over the counter medicines can also affect clozapine levels. This includes natural remedies and medications you have purchased without a prescription.

Decisions regarding your medication dose will be made between you and your psychiatrist to try to individualise your medication regimen to suit your lifestyle. If you don’t agree, please ask questions and take a support person with you to the appointment.

Take the clozapine as prescribed including when travelling, as changing the dose or times may result in increased side-effects or the medication being less effective.

If you miss a dose – don’t panic. Make sure you take your next dose as prescribed. Don’t ever take a double dose. If you are worried, contact your coordinator for advice or let them know at your next appointment. After hours call 13 14 65

If it has been more than two days since your last dose you must contact your doctor, clozapine nurse/coordinator before taking your next dose as it will probably need to be adjusted.

Clozapine should be stored in a safe, dry place, at room temperature, away from direct sunlight and out of the reach of children.

Who’s in your treating team?

You are number one: your opinion counts, as well as those that support and care for you. It is important for you to understand why you are being prescribed clozapine and to be actively involved in your recovery.

All consumers are encouraged to have a regular GP. GPs can be registered to prescribe clozapine once treatment is stable and work on a care plan with you.

Your psychiatrist reviews the treatment plan with you, and monitors how you are doing.

Your Clozapine Coordinator and/or GP will work closely with you to:
- Maintain a routine
- Coordinate blood tests and appointments
- Check your physical and mental health
- Provide a prescription
- Arrange extra tablets if you are planning a holiday or travelling overseas

If you have a care coordinator or clinician they will work with you on your Mental Health Care Plan.

The staff at your local pharmacy and blood collection centre play an important role and can also answer some of your questions.
Why do I need blood tests?
Blood tests are compulsory because in rare cases clozapine has been known to lower the number of white blood cells which are important in fighting infection. These tests include:

- The main blood test is a CBE (Complete Blood Examination). The person taking the blood needs to put it in a container with a purple top
- When you start clozapine you will have a weekly CBE blood test for 18 weeks, then every 28 days unless you become unwell. You will also need to check your temperature every day for the first 28 days (you can write it down to keep track)
- Clozapine levels when required at least every 6 months. If you take a morning dose wait until after the blood test to take it.
- Fasting blood tests (glucose & cholesterol) should be done first thing in the morning. This requires fasting for 8 hours with nothing to eat or drink except water

These and other tests ordered by your doctor are done to check your physical health and should be free. You will be helped to choose a blood collection centre closest to your home.

Heart Health
Your doctor will arrange regular heart tests such as an Electrocardiograph (ECG), Echocardiogram (ECHO) and other blood tests, because in rare cases clozapine can affect the heart.

Taking care of my own Health
It is important to maintain your health by:

- eating a healthy varied diet
- drinking plenty of water
- cleaning your teeth morning and night
- regularly exercising and
- reducing or quitting smoking, remembering that this must be planned with your doctor

Talk with your doctor or Clozapine Coordinator if you are concerned about anything – never be afraid to ask questions.

Shared Care with your GP
Clozapine care can be managed by registered GPs, who can then collaborate with your psychiatrist and Clozapine Coordinator.

Consumer’s comments on shared care:
“it’s easier and more convenient for me to see my local doctor.”
“It promotes holistic/complete care.”
“It gives me the opportunity to choose who provides my health care.”

GPs can assist you with your health care plan and goals and refer you to other health services such as physiotherapy, podiatry, dietician, psychology and others.

For more information:
Ask your pharmacist for printed information such as the Consumer Medication Information leaflet.

Online information can be found at SA Health, Sane, Headspace, Beyond Blue, MIFS A, Inner Voice, Mindshare and Its allright.

Translating Centre Service (08) 8226 1990 or the Transcultural Mental Health Centre offers free information in other languages.

Emergency contact after hours
13 14 65

Your clozapine centre details are available from your local Mental Health Centre