

## The Big Issue – Side Effects

It is important to encourage the person to discuss side effects at each visit with their doctor and/or Clozapine Coordinator nurse so that side effects can be addressed straight away. Some of the side effects may decrease over time and others can be managed. **If the person experiences any changes in side effects or their physical health that worries you or the person, tell the doctor or nurse.**

### Some common side effects include:

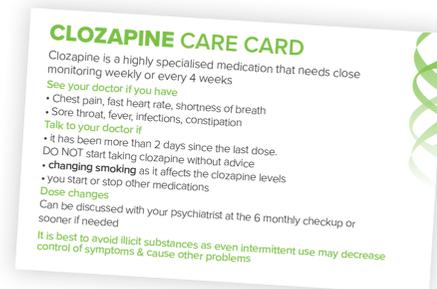
- Tiredness, drowsiness
- Dizziness or light headedness when standing up
- Fast heart rate
- Increase in saliva or dribbling (mostly at night)
- **Constipation**
- Weight gain

### RARE but serious side effects

**If these occur the person must seek urgent medical care.**

- Fever, sore throat, mouth ulcers or “flu-like” symptoms can be an effect of blood conditions (agranulocytosis or neutropenia)
- Seizures (fits) if blood levels go too high
- Problems controlling or passing urine
- Confusion, muscle stiffness, unsteadiness and collapse
- Severe constipation or diarrhoea if left untreated can lead to bowel blockage
- Chest pain, racing heart beat or shortness of breath

A wallet size **Clozapine Care card** is available and can be carried by the person taking clozapine. In emergency situations it can be shown to any hospital staff that may not know the person or be familiar with clozapine.



## IF AT ANY TIME YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT CLOZAPINE?

Ask the doctor, nurse or pharmacist who sees the person you support.

**As a carer, it is important to look after your own health and wellbeing too.**

**If you are seeking support contact the Carer Gateway 1800 422 737**

[www.carergateway.gov.au](http://www.carergateway.gov.au)

This is not intended to replace the Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) for clozapine. Please speak to the pharmacist who sees the person you support to get a copy of the CMI and any further information that you require.

Extra fact sheets on clozapine and managing side effects are available through the Clozapine Coordinator and SA Health [sahealth.sa.gov.au/clozapine](http://sahealth.sa.gov.au/clozapine)

Interpreting and Translating Centre  
1800 280 203

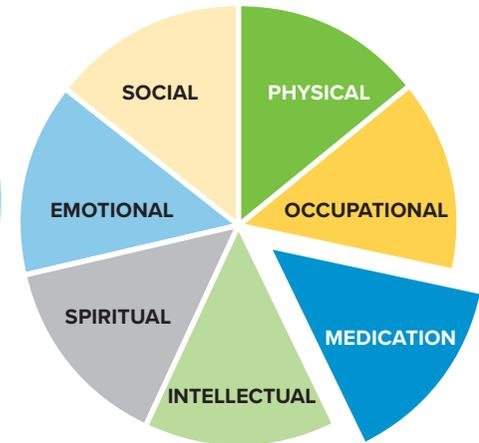
Emergency contact after hours  
13 14 65

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# Clozapine Information for Carers and Support Persons



**Medication can play a significant role in recovery and wellbeing**



Government of South Australia  
SA Health

## What do I need to know about taking clozapine?

Clozapine is a specialized antipsychotic medication that can help treat symptoms of schizophrenia when other medications haven't worked.

It is important for the person that you are supporting who is taking clozapine to have a regular routine for attending to blood tests and appointments and to **book them in advance**.

**These health check-ups are required to monitor the response to treatment and pickup and manage any abnormal results.**

### Why are blood tests required?

Blood tests are necessary because in rare cases clozapine has been known to lower the number of white blood cells which are important in fighting infection. They are also done to check physical health.

### The Clozapine process

<p><b>When starting clozapine</b> for the first time blood testing and medical appointments are attended weekly for the first 18 weeks.</p> <p>The person taking clozapine will also need to <b>check and record their temperature every day for the first 28 days</b> on the temperature monitoring sheet.</p>	
<p>Every <b>28</b> days</p>	<p>A Complete Blood Examination (CBE) is collected in a purple top container. ●</p> <p>Usually on a Monday or Tuesday</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 2px;"><b>Within 48 hours of the blood test</b></p> <p>The person <b>must</b> attend a regular appointment with the doctor or nurse who will check:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The blood test result</li> <li>The person's wellbeing and ask about any side effects</li> <li>Blood pressure</li> <li>Temperature and pulse</li> <li>Weight and waist measurement</li> <li>Arrangements for the next prescription</li> <li>Give the person a blood form</li> </ul>
<p>At least every <b>6</b> months</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Clozapine level</b> blood test is done 12 hours after the last dose.</li> <li>Medication can then be taken after the blood test.</li> <li><b>Diabetes and cholesterol</b> blood tests must be done after the person has fasted for at least 8 hours from food and fluid (water is OK).</li> <li><b>Liver and kidney blood tests</b></li> <li><b>Psychiatric specialist review</b></li> </ul>
<p>Every <b>12</b> months</p>	<p><b>Heart check-up</b></p> <p>In rare cases clozapine can affect the heart. Tests can help to pick up problems early:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electrocardiograph (ECG)</li> <li>Echocardiogram (ECHO)</li> </ul>

**Decisions regarding the clozapine dose** will be made with the person and their psychiatrist to create a plan to suit their lifestyle. We encourage the person to ask questions and if required take a support person with them to the appointment particularly in the early weeks of clozapine treatment.

**Clozapine must be taken as prescribed including when travelling**, as changing the dose or times may result in increased side effects or the medication being less effective.

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

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION

The factors below can affect clozapine and need to be discussed with the doctor or nurse as the dose may need to be changed.

**Starting, stopping or cutting down cigarette and cannabis smoking** can significantly change clozapine levels and side effects. The person will need to work with the doctor or nurse to safely make the changes that they want.

**Caffeine** (coffee, tea, cola, energy and diet drinks) can increase clozapine levels.

**Alcohol and Illicit Drugs** can increase the sedative side effects making the person feel excessively tired and have poor concentration. They are also not good for physical health.

**Other prescribed and over the counter medicines** need to be discussed with the doctor and pharmacist as they may interact with clozapine.

**If the person misses a dose don't panic**, make sure they take the next dose as prescribed. The person should never take a double dose. If you or the person is worried, contact the doctor or nurse for advice. After hours call 13 14 65.

**If the person has forgotten to take Clozapine for more than two days**, they must not start taking it again before the doctor has been contacted.

**Don't hesitate to Contact the clozapine coordinator or doctor if:**

- The person has a buildup of spare tablets or the person is not taking doses as prescribed.
- There is a noticeable change in the persons mental state, behaviour or physical health
- You have any concerns regarding the persons health and wellbeing

## Taking care of health

It is important to maintain health by:

- Eating a healthy varied diet
- Drinking plenty of water
- Have good routines for wellbeing and self-care
- Cleaning teeth morning and night (this also helps keep white cell counts up)
- Regularly exercising and
- Reducing or quitting smoking. Plan this with the doctor.

## You as a carer or support person

**Your opinion** counts, as does that of the person on clozapine. It is important for you:

- To understand why the person is being prescribed clozapine and to be actively involved in their recovery.
- To encourage the person to establish a regular routine of blood test and appointments.
- To encourage the person to have a **regular GP** who can work with them on their health care plan.

**Shared Care** A GP can be registered to prescribe clozapine and work with the psychiatrist, pharmacist and Clozapine Coordinator.

The GP can also If needed refer to a dietician, psychologist, physiotherapist or podiatrist.

We encourage people who are stable on clozapine to engage with their GP with the plan to establish a shared care arrangement. This provides a consistent and more holistic approach to care

At least every **six months the psychiatrist** will review the medication and treatment plan with the person and where possible carers/support people and let the GP know if anything needs to change.

The **Clozapine Coordinator nurse and /or GP** will work closely with the person and you to:

- Keep up with a treatment routine and a plan for taking the clozapine at a regular time each day
- Coordinate blood tests and appointments
- Check physical and mental health
- Provide prescriptions
- Arrange extra tablets if the person is planning a holiday or travelling overseas.