

## Clozapine and alcohol – The risks

This factsheet gives information on the potential risks of drinking alcohol if you are taking the medication clozapine. It is for people who take clozapine in England and for their carers, friends, and relatives.

### Key Points.

- Clozapine is an antipsychotic medication. It is used to treat the symptoms of schizophrenia and other psychosis related conditions.
- Clozapine and alcohol together can cause your nervous system to slow down, which can be dangerous. Sometimes, life-threatening.
- If you get symptoms of central nervous system depression, get immediate medical help.
- If you are prescribed clozapine, discuss alcohol use with your healthcare professional.
- Alcohol can affect clozapine and other antipsychotics in other ways.
- There can be other risks when taking clozapine.
- If you take antipsychotics, you should be offered regular physical health checks.

### This factsheet covers:

1. [What is clozapine?](#)
2. [Why can alcohol use and clozapine be risky?](#)
3. [How else can alcohol affect clozapine and other antipsychotics?](#)
4. [How can I get a copy of a patient information leaflet?](#)
5. [Are there other risks when taking clozapine?](#)
6. [Should I get physical health checks?](#)

## 1. What is clozapine?

Clozapine is an antipsychotic medication.

Antipsychotic medications are mainly used to treat the symptoms of schizophrenia and other psychosis related conditions.

Clozapine can also be known by its trade names of Clozaril, Denzapine, and Zaponex.<sup>1</sup>

Clozapine is usually offered to people who are treatment resistant.<sup>2</sup> This means other medications have not helped reduce or control symptoms well enough.

You should only usually be offered Clozapine if you have tried 2 other antipsychotics.<sup>3</sup>

You can find more information about:

- Antipsychotics
- Drugs, alcohol, and mental health
- Psychosis
- Schizophrenia

at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call our us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

## 2. Why can alcohol use and clozapine be risky?

If you take clozapine, drinking alcohol can be risky.<sup>4</sup>

The NHS say:<sup>5</sup>

- there are risks when drinking alcohol while taking clozapine,
- it can cause central nervous system depression, which can cause the brain and nervous system to slow down, and
- if the nervous system slows down too much, it can be life-threatening.

The NHS Specialist Pharmacy Service website also warns about the risks of central nervous system depression caused by alcohol and clozapine: [www.sps.nhs.uk/articles/clinical-considerations-for-patients-prescribed-clozapine](http://www.sps.nhs.uk/articles/clinical-considerations-for-patients-prescribed-clozapine). It says patients should be made aware of the risk.<sup>6</sup>

The British National Formulary (BNF) is a UK medications guide used by psychiatrists and other healthcare professionals in the NHS.

The BNF has an online guide on clozapine interactions here: <https://bnf.nice.org.uk/interactions/clozapine>

The BNF online guide also warns of the risk of central nervous system depression caused by alcohol and clozapine. It says the risks could range from sedation to unconsciousness, coma, respiratory depression, and cardiovascular depression.<sup>7</sup>

Sedation means being very sleepy or relaxed. Respiratory depression means when you breathe too slowly or too shallowly.<sup>8</sup>

BNF does not say what it means by cardiovascular depression. It could mean more than one thing. So, we have written to NICE, who publish the BNF, to ask what they mean. When they reply we will update this information.

It is very important you:

- discuss alcohol use with your healthcare professional, and
- carefully read your medication patient information leaflet to see what it says about alcohol use. The box your medication comes in should include a patient information leaflet. See below for how you can get a copy of the leaflet.

The symptoms of central nervous system depression are:<sup>9</sup>

- Over sedated or unusually sleepy.
- More confused or forgetful than normal.
- Un-coordinated, slow reflexes or difficulty moving. Un-coordinated means your body movements are not working smoothly together.
- Slurred speech.
- Breathing unusually slowly or have other breathing difficulties.
- A slow pulse or heart rate.
- A dry mouth.
- Blue lips.
- Clammy, cold skin.

You should get help straight away by calling 999 if you or a loved one show signs of the symptoms above.

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### 3. How else can alcohol affect clozapine and other antipsychotics?

Alcohol can affect clozapine and other antipsychotics in other ways. So, you should:

- discuss with your healthcare professional how alcohol use can affect you if you take antipsychotics, and
- carefully read your medication patient information leaflet to see what it says about alcohol use. The box your medication comes in should include the leaflet. See below for how you can get a copy of the leaflet.

Drinking alcohol with antipsychotics might increase the sedative effects.<sup>10</sup> This means you might feel very tired.

Alcohol can cause sedation, which might affect your ability to:<sup>11</sup>

- drive, even if you are under the legal alcohol limit, or
- do skilled tasks, like operate machinery.

You can talk to your healthcare professional about these things.

You can find more information about Driving and mental illness at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call our us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

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#### 4. How can I get a copy of a patient information leaflet?

You can get a copy of a patient information leaflet for your medication online.

You can do this by visiting the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) website at:

<https://products.mhra.gov.uk/substance-index>

Be sure to search for exactly the right type of medication. There might be several different types of the same medication. Look at your medication box for the right type.

If you have any questions about your medication, you can also speak to:

- your psychiatrist,
- your GP, or
- a pharmacist.

You can find more information about GPs and your mental health at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call our us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

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#### 5. Are there other risks when taking clozapine?

##### Is there a risk my white blood cell number will drop?

The main risk is clozapine can cause your white blood cell numbers to drop.<sup>12</sup>

Drops in white blood cells can lead to infections. You will need regular blood tests to make sure your white blood cell count is healthy.<sup>13</sup>

Your health professional should invite you to have blood tests. You will need:<sup>14</sup>

- weekly blood tests for the first 18 weeks, then
- for the next year, you will need blood tests every 2-weeks, then,
- blood test should be done once a month.

You will be asked to stop taking clozapine if your white blood cell numbers start dropping.<sup>15</sup>

You will have another blood test after you have stopped clozapine to make sure they are back to normal.

### What about other side effects?

Clozapine can also cause other side effects. Common ones including pooling of saliva in the mouth, weight gain, severe constipation, and a fast heartbeat.<sup>16</sup>

You can read about possible side effects in the patient information leaflet or ask your healthcare professional about them.

You can find more information about:

- Antipsychotics
- Medication - Choice and managing problems

at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

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## 6. Should I get physical health checks?

If you take antipsychotics, you should be offered regular physical health checks for certain things.<sup>17</sup>

This is because antipsychotics can cause risks and side effects, like weight gain.<sup>18</sup>

If you are not getting these regular physical health checks, you can speak to your GP.

You can read our information on:

- Severe mental illness and physical health checks
- Physical activity and mental health

at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org).

You can find more information about Antipsychotics at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy.

## Did this help?

We would love to know if this information helped you or if you found any issues with this page. You can email us at [feedback@rethink.org](mailto:feedback@rethink.org)

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Medicines & Healthcare products Regulatory Agency. *Antipsychotic Medicines Guidance*, [www.gov.uk/government/publications/antipsychotic-medicines-licensed-products-uses-and-side-effects/antipsychotic-medicines](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/antipsychotic-medicines-licensed-products-uses-and-side-effects/antipsychotic-medicines). (Assessed 30th July 2024) Para 2.
- <sup>2</sup> National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. *Psychosis and Schizophrenia in adults: Quality statement 4: Treatment with clozapine* [www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs80/chapter/Quality-statement-4-Treatment-with-clozapine](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs80/chapter/Quality-statement-4-Treatment-with-clozapine) (Assessed 30th July 2024)
- <sup>3</sup> National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. *Psychosis and Schizophrenia in adults: Quality statement 4: Treatment with clozapine* [www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs80/chapter/Quality-statement-4-Treatment-with-clozapine](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs80/chapter/Quality-statement-4-Treatment-with-clozapine) ((Assessed 30th July 2024)
- <sup>4</sup> NHS Southwest London and St Georges and Mental Health. *Clozapine in the news*. <https://swlstg.nhs.uk/latest-news/clozapine-in-the-news-1981> (accessed 16 August 2024)
- <sup>5</sup> NHS Southwest London and St Georges and Mental Health. *Clozapine in the news*. See 1<sup>st</sup> para <https://swlstg.nhs.uk/latest-news/clozapine-in-the-news-1981> (23 January 2025)
- <sup>6</sup> NHS specialist pharmacy service. *Clinical considerations for patients prescribed clozapine*. See 'Other factors', 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph <https://www.sps.nhs.uk/articles/clinical-considerations-for-patients-prescribed-clozapine/> (accessed 30 August 2024)
- <sup>7</sup> The British National Formulary (BNF). *Interactions – Clozapine*. See 'Alcohol' <https://bnf.nice.org.uk/interactions/clozapine> (accessed 14 October 2024)
- <sup>8</sup> Cleveland Clinic. *Respiratory Depression (Hypoventilation)*. See 1<sup>st</sup> para. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/respiratory-depression> (accessed 23 January 2024)
- <sup>9</sup> NHS Southwest London and St Georges and Mental Health. *Clozapine in the news*. <https://swlstg.nhs.uk/latest-news/clozapine-in-the-news-1981> (accessed 16 August 2024)
- <sup>10</sup> The National Institute of care excellence (NICE). *Psychosis and schizophrenia- Adverse effects*. See 'Sedation' (Last updated September 2021) [cks.nice.org.uk/topics/psychosis-schizophrenia/prescribing-information/adverse-effects](https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/psychosis-schizophrenia/prescribing-information/adverse-effects) (Assessed 30th July 2024)
- <sup>11</sup> National Institute of Care Excellence. British National Formulary. *Clozapine*. See 'Interactions' – 'Alcohol' <https://bnf.nice.org.uk/interactions/clozapine/#:~:text=Alcohol,%20in%20Guidance%20on%20Prescribing>). (accessed 30 August 2024)
- <sup>12</sup> Royal College of Psychiatrists. *Antipsychotics*. See 'When is Clozapine used?' – para 6 [www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/treatments-and-wellbeing/antipsychotics](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/treatments-and-wellbeing/antipsychotics) (accessed 30<sup>th</sup> July 2024)
- <sup>13</sup> Royal College of Psychiatrists. *Antipsychotics: When is Clozapine used*. [www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/treatments-and-wellbeing/antipsychotics](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/treatments-and-wellbeing/antipsychotics) (accessed 30<sup>th</sup> July 2024)
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(accessed 30<sup>th</sup> July 2024)

<sup>17</sup> National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. *Psychosis and schizophrenia. What monitoring is required?* <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/psychosis-schizophrenia/prescribing-information/monitoring> (accessed 22 January 2025)

<sup>18</sup> National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. *Psychosis and schizophrenia. Adverse effects?* <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/psychosis-schizophrenia/prescribing-information/adverse-effects/> (accessed 22 January 2025)

This factsheet is available in large print

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**Phone 0808 801 0525**

**Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm -  
excluding bank holidays**

**Webchat service available**

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### Write to us for advice at:

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28 Albert Embankment, London, SE1 7GR

### Need to talk to an adviser?

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**Patient Information Forum**

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### Do you have accessibility tools for this information?

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