# Quetiapine

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**Summary:** Quetiapine (Seroquel®, Seroquel XR®) belongs to a group of medications called “atypical antipsychotics” or “second-generation antipsychotics”. It is used in many different conditions including problems with mood, anxiety as well as problems with psychosis.

## Overview

Quetiapine (Seroquel®, Seroquel XR®) belongs to a group of medications called “atypical antipsychotics” or “second-generation antipsychotics”.

## What is Quetiapine Used For?

- Schizophrenia and other thought disorders
- Bipolar disorder (including depressive symptoms of bipolar disorder)
- Symptoms associated with autism
- Depression
- Anxiety disorders
- Some sleep disorders
- Conduct disorder (aggression)

Your doctor may be using this medication for another reason. If you are unclear why this medication is being prescribed, please ask your doctor.

## How Does Quetiapine Work?

Like other atypical antipsychotics, quetiapine affects the levels of certain chemicals in the brain called dopamine and serotonin. This has been shown to help people who have disorders like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder with their symptoms. The exact way that antipsychotics improve the symptoms of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder is not fully known.

## Quetiapine in Children and Adolescents

Like many medications used to treat childhood disorders, quetiapine has not been officially approved by Health Canada for use in children and adolescents.
However, Quetiapine is FDA-approved (in the USA) for the treatment of these conditions in children and adolescents.

- Schizophrenia
- Bipolar disorder

In addition, studies also suggest it might be helpful for:

- Conduct disorder
    - Quetiapine was been shown to be better than placebo for treatment of conduct disorder (aggression).
- Treatment-resistant depression in adults
    - In adults, quetiapine has been shown to be better than placebo for treatment of depression after standard antidepressants have failed, though this has not been shown for children and adolescents.
- Autism
- Anxiety disorders
- Sleep (though the evidence is limited.)

When the potential benefits (e.g., reducing your symptoms) of using quetiapine outweigh the potential risks (e.g., the side effects), many doctors may prescribe it “off-label”.

## How Should Quetiapine Be Taken?

Quetiapine is available in tablets and extended release (XR) tablets. It is usually taken once daily (XR tablet) or twice daily (regular tablet) with or without food. This medication should be taken at the same time(s) each day as directed by your doctor. Try to connect taking it with something you do each day (like eating breakfast or brushing your teeth) so you don’t forget. Try to avoid alcohol while taking quetiapine.

Usually, your doctor will start with a low dose of quetiapine that is best suited to your age and weight. This dose will then be slowly increased over several days or weeks based on how you respond to it. You and your doctor can then discuss the best dosage to stay on based on how you tolerate this medication (how well it helps decrease your symptoms and how you are doing with side effects).

Quetiapine extended release (XR) tablets should be swallowed whole with fluids.
Do NOT crush, chew or divide quetiapine extended release (XR) tablets.

## When Will Quetiapine Start Working?

This depends on what you are using it for. Some improvements may be seen in as little as 1 to 2 weeks. However, it can sometimes take up to 6 weeks to see the full benefits of the medication. When quetiapine is working well, you may notice that your thoughts are clearer and more organized. Agitation may be decreased and hearing voices or seeing things no one else sees (hallucinations) may stop completely or happen much less. Your mood may be more settled and you may see a reduction of intense fears and worries. It is important that you continue taking quetiapine regularly even if you are feeling well, as it can prevent symptoms from returning. If you are taking this medication to help with symptoms of mood disturbance or sleep, you may notice some changes in the first 1 to 2 weeks.

Medications like quetiapine do not work for everyone. If you are not feeling better within 6 weeks, your doctor may recommend switching you to a different medication.

## How Long Do I Have to Take Quetiapine?

This depends on the symptoms you have, how frequently they occur, and how long you have had them. Most people will need to take quetiapine for several months. This allows time for your symptoms to stabilize and for you to regain your functioning. Your doctor will discuss the benefits and risks of taking quetiapine with you. At this time, you can also discuss how long you might need to take this medication.

Do not increase, decrease, or stop taking this medication without discussing it with your doctor.  If you stop taking quetiapine suddenly, it is possible that your symptoms may return or you may have a bad reaction.

## Is Quetiapine Addictive?

No, quetiapine is not addictive and you will not have “cravings” for this medication like you might with nicotine or street drugs. If you and your doctor decide it is best for you to stop taking quetiapine, your doctor will explain how to safely come off this medication so you don’t feel negative effects as your body adjusts to being without it.

## What are the Side Effects and What Should I Do if I Get Them?

As with most medications, side effects may occur when taking quetiapine. However, most side effects are mild and temporary. Sometimes the side effects may occur before any of the beneficial effects. It is also possible for some individuals to experience side effects that they feel are concerning or long-lasting. If this occurs, speak to your doctor about ways to manage them. On the next page are some of the more common side effects of taking this medicine. In brackets are suggested ways to lessen these effects.

## Common Side Effects

Side effects are usually more common when starting a medication or after a dose increase. If any of these side effects is troublesome for you, please discuss them with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

- Agitation (avoid caffeine from energy drinks, colas and coffee)
- Constipation (increase exercise, fluids, vegetables, fruits and fiber)
- Dizziness (try getting up slowly from a sitting or lying down position)
- Drowsiness (try taking the dose at bedtime)
- Dry mouth (try chewing sugarless gum, sour candies, ice chips, or popsicles)
- Headache (try using a pain reliever like acetaminophen (plain Tylenol®))
- Increase in hunger (avoid high calorie foods)
- Stomach ache (try taking the medication with food)
- Weight gain (monitor your food intake, increase your exercise)

Uncommon side effects (e.g., those that occur in less than 5% of patients)

Contact your doctor IMMEDIATELY if you have any of these side effects:

- Fainting, feeling lightheaded or difficulties with balance
- Fast or irregular heart beat
- Feelings of restlessness
- Fever or excessive sweating
- Frequent urination accompanied by excessive thirst
- Rash
- Seizures
- Shaking, stiffness or difficulty moving, muscle spasm or stiffness in your throat or tongue
- Thoughts of hurting yourself, suicide, increased irritability/hostility or feeling worse
- Weakness or severe muscle pain

Quetiapine is sometimes associated with a very rare side effect called “neuroleptic malignant syndrome”. The symptoms may include severe muscle stiffness, high fever, increased heart rate and blood pressure, irregular heartbeat (pulse) and sweating. Contact your doctor right away if this occurs.

On rare occasions, quetiapine and medications like it have been associated with a side effect called “tardive dyskinesia”. This is a side effect that can sometimes become permanent in patients who take antipsychotic medications. It involves involuntary movements of some muscles in the body like the lips, tongue, toes, hands and neck. Stopping the antipsychotic at the first signs of it occurring or switching to another “atypical” antipsychotic can decrease the chances of having this side effect continue.

Tip: Quetiapine can make some individuals feel drowsy, dizzy, or slowed down. If you experience these temporary side effects, it is important to avoid operating heavy machinery or driving a car.

## What Precautions Should My Doctor and I Be Aware of When Taking Quetiapine?

Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you:

- Have any allergies or have experienced a reaction to a medication.
- Are lactose intolerant (quetiapine tablets contain lactose)
- Are taking or plan to start taking any other prescription or non-prescription medications (including herbal products). Some medications can interact with quetiapine, such as some sedatives, blood pressure medications, some antibiotics and several others. Your doctor may need to change the doses of your medications or monitor you carefully for side effects if you are taking medications that interact with quetiapine.
- Have a history of heart disease, seizures, kidney or liver disease, a bowel obstruction, diabetes (or a family history of diabetes) or glaucoma.
- Miss a period, are pregnant (or are planning to become pregnant) or are breast-feeding. Tell your doctor if you become pregnant while taking quetiapine.
- Are currently using alcohol or street drugs as these substances can decrease how well quetiapine works for you and/or make you feel drowsy.

## Any Special Instructions With Quetiapine?

- Keep all appointments with your doctor and the laboratory. Your doctor may order certain lab tests to check how you are responding to quetiapine, and to monitor for side effects.
- Try to keep a healthy and well-balanced diet and exercise regularly. Some individuals who take quetiapine may gain weight due to an increase in appetite.
- Do not allow anyone else to use your medication.

## What If I Forget to Take a Dose?

If you take quetiapine only in the evening or at bedtime and you forget to take it, skip the missed dose and continue with your regular schedule the next day. Do NOT double your next dose. If you take quetiapine more than once a day, take the missed dose as soon as possible. However, if it is almost time for your next dose (e.g., within 4 hours), skip the missed dose and continue with your regular schedule. Do NOT double your next dose.

## How Do I Store Quetiapine?

- Keep this medication in the original container, stored at room temperature away from moisture and heat (e.g., not in the bathroom or kitchen).
- Keep this medication out of reach and sight of children.

## About this Document

Special thanks to the Kelty Centre for Mental Health for permission to adapt this document. The original document

was developed by health professionals of BC Mental Health and Addiction Services, and reviewed by the staff of the Kelty Mental Health Centre. French translation provided courtesy of the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health.

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