

Remeron (mirtazapine)

Remeron is a drug most commonly used for depression, though it may also be used to treat anxiety. It is similar to SSRI and SNRI antidepressants, though is actually in a separate class by itself with effects on brain serotonin and histamine levels / receptors.

It is sometimes used in an attempt to stimulate appetite, though it is not approved for this indication and seldom works unless the patient has depression responding to it. Even then, weight increases in only 1 patient in 8.

Patients are often started on medications with limited discussion about intended benefits or likely or potential side effects. This document is intended to augment information that may have already been provided. If you have questions, please ask the primary provider.

When used to treat depression or anxiety, improvement would be expected in weeks to months, not days. Conversely, if there is no benefit in several months, there is very little chance that it will work at the dose given. It is given as a single daily dose and often causes sleepiness, so is usually given in the evening.

Potential adverse effects are unusual, but they do happen. Both “Serious” reactions can occur as well as others that are more “Common”. Lists like this are available from many sources and are not always identical. There is no intent to list every possible side effect or to address the potential interactions that may occur with concomitant use with other drugs.

Potential Serious Reactions

Agranulocytosis
(Loss of White Blood Cells)
Low Blood Pressure
Worsening Depression
Mania / Manic Episodes

Seizures
Extreme Restlessness
EKG/Heart Conduction Changes
(Torsades de Pointes)
Hyponatremia (Low Sodium)

Severe Skin Reactions
Withdrawal Symptoms
(when abruptly discontinued)
Serotonin Syndrome

Common Side Effects

Somnolence / Sleepiness
Cracked Lips
Increased Appetite
Weight Gain or Loss
Increased Cholesterol
Increased Triglycerides
Constipation

Loss of Muscle Strength
Dizziness / Fainting
Falls / Fractures
Cough / Fever
Abnormal Dreams or Thinking
Tremors
Confusion

Edema (Swelling)
Abnormal Liver Function Tests
Muscle or Back Pains
Urinary Frequency
Sensitivity to light

More educational materials and information are available on the FDA’s website at:

<http://www.fda.gov/downloads/Drugs/DrugSafety/ucm088579.pdf>

When a resident’s depressive or anxious symptoms do not respond favorably after several months of use or when side effects attributable to the medication occur, the facility and providers may taper the medication (slowly reduce the dose) to see if it can be discontinued.