

Mefloquine (Lariam)

What is Mefloquine?

Mefloquine is an antimalarial drug. Lariam is the trade name for Mefloquine.

Why should I take Mefloquine?

In some parts of South America, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific, malaria has become resistant to Chloroquine (another antimalarial drug). Mefloquine may be prescribed for this reason.

How do I take Mefloquine?

Adults: Take one (1) 250 mg. tablet once a week, one week before going to the malarial area, weekly while you are in the malarial area, and for four weeks after leaving the malarial area.

Children: Dosage depends on the child's weight. For children who weigh less than 15 kg and travelling to a Chloroquine resistant area, there is no data upon which to recommend a correct dose. The World Health Organization has suggested a preventive dose of 5 mg/kg/wk in children weighing more than 5 kg.

Mefloquine should be stored at 15°C – 30°C in the original blister pack as the tablets are sensitive to moisture. It should be taken with food and plenty of water. Do not chew the tablets.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

Take it as soon as you realize you have forgotten and then take each remaining dose according to the dosage schedule, counting from the day that you took the missed dose. Do not take more than one tablet in any one week.

Do not take Mefloquine if you:

- have or had depression,
- have had recent mental illness or problems including panic attacks, anxiety disorder, schizophrenia (a severe type of mental illness), or psychosis (losing touch with reality),
- have or had seizures (epilepsy, convulsions),
- are allergic to quinine or quinidine (medications related to Mefloquine),
- have liver or heart disease,
- are a pregnant or nursing woman, or
- may become pregnant while taking Mefloquine.

Discuss with your doctor if you are taking:

- any medications that contain quinine, quinidine or chloroquine,
- medications which affect the heart such as certain heart and high blood pressure medication (beta blockers, calcium channel blockers),
- antihistamines or H1-blocking agents (astemizole (hismanal), terfenadine (seldane), or
- certain antidepressants (tricyclic) and phenothiazines.

Possible side effects:

- Nausea, vomiting, dizziness, lightheadedness or loss of balance, headache, sleepiness, inability to sleep, abnormal dreams, loose stools or diarrhea and abdominal pain.
- In rarer cases, loss of appetite, abnormal heartbeat, itching of skin or skin rash, hair loss, eye sight problems, muscle pains, convulsions, and disturbances of mood (depressed mood, mental confusion, anxiety states may occur).
- Do not drive or operate machinery until you know how you react to this medication, i.e., that you have no dizziness.

Usually, side effects are mild. Occasionally people taking Lariam experience severe anxiety, feelings that people are against them, hallucinations (for example, seeing or hearing things that are not there), depression, unusual behaviour, or feeling disoriented.

While taking Mefloquine, if you develop a sudden onset of unexplained anxiety, depression, restlessness or irritability, or confusion (possible signs of more serious mental problems) or develop other serious side effects, including abnormal heartbeat or palpitations, contact a doctor or health care provider immediately. It may be necessary to stop taking Mefloquine and use another malaria prevention medication instead.

You should avoid becoming pregnant while you are taking Mefloquine and for three months after the last dose.

Other important protection against malaria:

- Avoid going outdoors from dusk to dawn.
- Wear light-coloured clothes that cover most of the body.
- Use an insect repellent containing DEET on exposed skin.
- Sleep under mosquito netting.

Antimalarial drugs do not guarantee protection. Think of malaria whenever you develop fever or flu-like illness within a year after leaving a malarial area, and seek medical attention immediately.