

Muscular Dystrophy Association Motor Neuron Disease Clinic

At
The University of Utah
Department of Neurology

Managing Exaggerated Emotions

What are exaggerated emotions?

Some patients with ALS may experience an ease of laughing or crying and difficulty stopping these emotions. This is due to loss of upper motor neurons from ALS, and is not under the patient's control. Patients may describe more frequent and wider yawning, and this is also considered to be due to loss of upper motor neurons.

Can exaggerated emotions be treated?

For some patients, exaggerated emotions are only mildly troublesome. Exaggerated emotions can be treated with amitriptyline (Elavil®). This medication was originally designed to be an antidepressant. However, neurologists have found many other uses for it when prescribed for the ALS patient. A much smaller dose is used than the dosage for depression. The medication is not habit forming, but should not be stopped suddenly. If you want to stop taking it, please contact us.

Are there side effects?

Amitriptyline is very well tolerated. The most common side effect is sleepiness, most noticeable when first starting amitriptyline or when increasing the dose. We recommend that you take the medication at night, when the sleepiness will be welcomed. Occasionally, the sleepiness will linger into the morning. It is important that you not plan activities that require alertness, such as driving, the morning after taking your first dose or increasing the dose. The sleepiness lingering into the morning only lasts a day or so after changing the dose. This may be better if you take amitriptyline at bedtime (10 hours before you want to wake up). Another side effect is a dry mouth which can be treated by occasional sips of water or a sugarless hard candy. Rarely, in men who have an enlarged prostate gland, starting a urine stream may be difficult. If this occurs, you should contact us immediately and not take any more amitriptyline. Constipation may occur, and this is less likely if you drink plenty of water and include fiber in your diet.

Dosage Schedule

The following table outlines how to slowly increase the dosage so as to reduce the possibility of side effects. Amitriptyline is a 25 mg tablet. Increase the dose every 5 days if you do not have side effects and your symptoms are not improved.

Bedtime
1/2 tablet (12.5 mg)
Whole tablet (25 mg)
1 and 1/2 tablets (37.5 mg)
2 whole tablets (50 mg)

If you have any questions please contact Barbara Miano at (801) 585-6052.