Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Selegiline

This information from UpToDate® Lexidrug™ explains what you need to know about this medication, including what it's used for, how to take it, its side effects, and when to call your healthcare provider.

Brand Names: US

Emsam; Zelapar

Warning

Skin patch:

- Drugs like this one have raised the chance of suicidal thoughts or actions in children and young adults. The risk may be greater in people who have had these thoughts or actions in the past. All people who take this drug need to be watched closely. Call the doctor right away if signs like depression, nervousness, restlessness, grouchiness, panic attacks, or changes in mood or actions are new or worse. Call the doctor right away if any thoughts or actions of suicide occur.
- This drug is not approved for use in children. Do not give to a child younger than 12 years old. The risk of sudden, severe high blood pressure is raised in children younger than 12 years old.

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat Parkinson's disease.
- It is used to treat depression.
- It may be given to you for other reasons. Talk with the doctor.

What do I need to tell my doctor BEFORE I take this drug?

- If you are allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell your doctor about the allergy and what signs you had.
- If you have any of these health problems: Kidney disease or liver disease.
- If you have an adrenal gland tumor called pheochromocytoma.
- If you are using another drug that has the same drug in it.
- If you take any drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) that must not be taken with this drug, like certain drugs that are used for depression or other mood problems, pain, seizures, weight loss, and the common cold. There are many drugs that must not be taken with this drug.
- If you have taken certain drugs used for depression like isocarboxazid, phenelzine, or tranylcypromine or drugs used for Parkinson's disease like rasagiline in the last 14 days. Taking this drug within 14 days of those drugs can cause severe high blood pressure.
- If you have taken fluoxetine within the last 5 weeks. Do not start this drug if you have taken fluoxetine within the last 5 weeks.
- If you are breast-feeding. Do not breast-feed while you take this drug. You may also need to avoid breast-feeding for some time after your last dose. Talk with your doctor to see if you need to avoid breast-feeding after your last dose.

This is not a list of all drugs or health problems that interact with this drug.

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of your drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe for you to take this drug with all of your drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug without checking with your doctor.

What are some things I need to know or do while I take this drug?

All products:

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Avoid driving and doing other tasks or actions that call for you to be alert until you see how this drug affects you.
- To lower the chance of feeling dizzy or passing out, rise slowly if you have been sitting or lying down. Be careful going up and down stairs.
- Check blood pressure and heart rate as the doctor has told you.
- Some foods and drinks, like cheese and red wine, may cause sudden, severe high blood pressure when you are taking this drug. This effect can be deadly. Talk with your doctor about your risk for this effect. Get a list of foods and drinks to avoid. Avoid these foods and drinks for as long as your doctor has told you after this drug is stopped.
- Avoid drinking alcohol while taking this drug.
- If you have phenylketonuria (PKU), talk with your doctor. Some products have phenylalanine.
- Neuroleptic malignant syndrome (NMS) is a severe and sometimes deadly health problem that has happened when drugs like this one were stopped all of a sudden. NMS has also happened when the dose was lowered. Call your doctor right away if you have any fever, muscle cramps or stiffness, dizziness, severe headache, confusion, change in thinking, fast or abnormal heartbeat, or are sweating a lot.
- A severe and sometimes deadly problem called serotonin syndrome may happen if you take this drug with certain other drugs. Call your doctor right away if you have agitation; change in balance; confusion; hallucinations; fever; fast or abnormal heartbeat; flushing; muscle twitching or stiffness; seizures; shivering or shaking; sweating a lot; severe diarrhea, upset stomach, or throwing up; or severe headache.
- If you are 65 or older, use this drug with care. You could have more side

effects.

- Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or plan on getting pregnant. You will need to talk about the benefits and risks of using this drug while you are pregnant.

Skin patch:

- Avoid use of heat sources (such as sunlamps, tanning beds, heating pads, electric blankets, heat lamps, saunas, hot tubs, heated waterbeds). Avoid long, hot baths or sunbathing. Your temperature may rise and cause too much drug to pass into your body.

What are some side effects that I need to call my doctor about right away?

WARNING/CAUTION: Even though it may be rare, some people may have very bad and sometimes deadly side effects when taking a drug. Tell your doctor or get medical help right away if you have any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

All products:

- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking; unusual hoarseness; or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat.
- Signs of high or low blood pressure like very bad headache or dizziness, passing out, or change in eyesight.
- Trouble controlling body movements, twitching, change in balance, trouble swallowing or speaking.
- Shakiness, trouble moving around, or stiffness.
- Feeling confused.
- Mental, mood, or behavior changes that are new or worse.
- Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that are not there).

- Strong urges that are hard to control (such as eating, gambling, sex, or spending money).
- Shortness of breath.
- Muscle pain or weakness.
- Neck stiffness.
- Chest pain or pressure.
- Fast, slow, or abnormal heartbeat.
- Sweating a lot.
- Larger pupils.
- If bright lights bother your eyes.
- Weakness on 1 side of the body, trouble speaking or thinking, change in balance, drooping on one side of the face, or blurred eyesight.
- Some people taking the oral form of this drug have fallen asleep during activities like driving, eating, or talking. Some people did not feel sleepy and felt alert right before falling asleep. This has happened up to 1 year after this drug was started. If you fall asleep during activities, do not drive or do other tasks or actions that call for you to be alert while you take this drug. Call your doctor right away if this happens or you feel very sleepy.

Oral-disintegrating tablet:

- Mouth sores.
- Very bad pain when swallowing.

What are some other side effects of this drug?

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother you or do not go away:

All products:

- Feeling dizzy or sleepy.
- Headache.
- Dry mouth.
- Constipation, diarrhea, throwing up, or upset stomach.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Nose or throat irritation.
- Back pain.
- Runny or stuffy nose.

Oral-disintegrating tablet:

- Mouth irritation.

Skin patch:

- Irritation where this drug was used.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, call your doctor. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-332-1088. You may also report side effects at https://www.fda.gov/medwatch.

How is this drug best taken?

Use this drug as ordered by your doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

Tablets and capsules:

- Take this drug with food.
- Keep using this drug as you have been told by your doctor or other health care provider, even if you feel well.

Oral-disintegrating tablet:

- Take before breakfast.
- Do not take this drug out of the blister pack until you are ready to take it. Take this drug right away after opening the blister pack. Do not store the removed drug for future use.
- Do not push the tablet out of the foil when opening. Use dry hands to take it from the foil. Place on your tongue and let it dissolve. Water is not needed. Do not swallow it whole. Do not chew, break, or crush it.
- Do not eat or drink for at least 5 minutes before or after taking this drug.
- Keep using this drug as you have been told by your doctor or other health care provider, even if you feel well.

Skin patch:

- Put patch on at the same time of day.
- Wash your hands before and after use.
- Put patch on clean, dry, healthy skin on the chest, back, upper leg, or upper arm.
- Do not cut or divide patches. Do not use patches that are damaged.
- Put the patch in a new area each time you change the patch.
- If there is hair where you are putting the patch, clip the hair as close to the skin as you can. Do not shave the hair.
- Do not put on skin that is irritated or damaged. Do not put on an area with skin folds or skin that will be rubbed by tight clothes.
- Do not put on skin where you have just used creams, oils, lotions, powder, or

other skin products. The patch may not stick as well.

- Wear only one patch at a time.
- Keep using this drug as you have been told by your doctor or other health care provider, even if you feel well.
- If the patch falls off, replace with a new one on a new site.
- After you take off a skin patch, be sure to fold the sticky sides of the patch to each other. Throw away used patches where children and pets cannot get to them.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

All oral products:

- Take a missed dose as soon as you think about it.
- If it is close to the time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your normal time.
- Do not take 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.

Skin patch:

- Put on a missed patch as soon as you think about it after taking off the old one.
- If it is close to the time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your normal time.
- Do not put on more than 1 patch at a time.

How do I store and/or throw out this drug?

All products:

- Store at room temperature in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.
- Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.
- Throw away unused or expired drugs. Do not flush down a toilet or pour down a drain unless you are told to do so. Check with your pharmacist if you

have questions about the best way to throw out drugs. There may be drug take-back programs in your area.

Oral-disintegrating tablet:

- Store in pouch until ready for use.
- Use oral disintegrating tablets within 3 months of opening pouch.

Skin patch:

- Store patches in pouch until ready for use.

General drug facts

- If your symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your doctor.
- Do not share your drugs with others and do not take anyone else's drugs.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. Check with your pharmacist. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- If you think there has been an overdose, call your poison control center or get medical care right away. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.

Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer

This generalized information is a limited summary of diagnosis, treatment, and/or medication information. It is not meant to be comprehensive and should be used as a tool to help the user understand and/or assess potential diagnostic and treatment options. It does NOT include all information about conditions, treatments, medications, side effects, or risks that may apply to a specific patient. It is not intended to be medical advice or a substitute for the medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment of a health care provider based on the health

care provider's examination and assessment of a patient's specific and unique circumstances. Patients must speak with a health care provider for complete information about their health, medical questions, and treatment options, including any risks or benefits regarding use of medications. This information does not endorse any treatments or medications as safe, effective, or approved for treating a specific patient. UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates disclaim any warranty or liability relating to this information or the use thereof. The use of this information is governed by the Terms of Use, available at https://www.wolterskluwer.com/en/know/clinical-effectiveness-terms.

Last Reviewed Date

2026-10-19

Copyright

© 2026 UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates and/or licensors. All rights reserved.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Selegiline - Last updated on December 12, 2022
All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center