Circadian Rhythms and Depression

You have received this leaflet because you have been prescribed Valdoxan® (agomelatine) by your doctor. Valdoxan is a medicine used to treat depression or to help prevent depression returning. It can do this by helping to regulate your ‘body clock’. The body clock controls our circadian rhythms – the daily mental and physical fluctuations that keep our bodies in tune with day and night.

‘Circadian’ comes from the Latin circa diem, meaning ‘about a day’. Functions affected by circadian rhythms can include our mental alertness, feelings of hunger, hormone pressure and body temperature. Valdoxan can help regulate your ‘body clock’ (circadian rhythm) with improvements in mood. It is important for you to know that Valdoxan is not addictive, has no effect on sexual function and has a negligible effect on body weight in clinical studies.

**Hunger, concentration and sleep in particular, follow a 24 hour clock.**

When you feel exhausted and disoriented after a long flight, it’s because your circadian rhythms have been thrown into confusion. For example, your internal clock may be telling you it’s 3am, even though it’s lunchtime in the country you’re now in.

**Our body clock**

At night, when it’s time to rest, our body systems need to be turned down. But in the daytime, we need to be physically and mentally active. In other words, our body needs to be in tune with the level of mental and physical activity that’s needed for a particular time of day – or night.

One way this is controlled is through a hormone called melatonin, which helps us sleep. When it’s dark our bodies produce this hormone. However, light suppresses it, and this lets our body clock know when it’s daytime.

The re-setting of the body clock is generally done via environmental ‘cues’ called zeitgebers (which is German for time keeper).

For example, when days become longer in summer, our body clocks need to get ready for a longer period of daylight, and a shorter period of darkness. This is when circadian rhythms show their genius, adapting for these changes by re-setting a little bit each day.

Light is the most powerful time keeper. However social behaviours, such as the time we go to bed, when we exercise and meal times, are also important. For example, our body clocks know when our metabolism is best geared to digest food, and accordingly signal us about the right time to eat.

Not surprisingly, people who do shift work can have problems with metabolism, and have associated health issues.

It’s not only shift work of course, that can upset our body clocks. The change of circadian rhythms owes much to the way we seem to increasingly live – and sleep – on the run.
Doctors now know that the body clocks of people suffering from depression can be upset. They’re either running too fast, or too slow. A common symptom of depression is waking up early in the morning, even though you still feel tired – and then being unable to get back to sleep.

**Resetting the body clock**

In many cases, people with depression can be shown how to maintain stable circadian rhythms by sticking to a regular routine. Getting up at 6am every morning, for example. Or keeping to a regular evening meal time. This is called social rhythm therapy, and can help reduce the risk of having more episodes of depression.

Some people however need assistance re-setting their body clock.

Valdoxan can help regulate your ‘body clock’ (circadian rhythm).

**Important things to remember when taking Valdoxan**

Valdoxan is processed by the liver. A routine blood test should be performed before treatment to check how your liver is functioning. While you are taking Valdoxan you will need further blood tests to check your liver continues to function properly. These tests should be performed:

- before the start of treatment and before a dose increase to 50mg (dose should only be increased by your doctor).

and then around:

- 3 weeks,
- 6 weeks,
- 12 weeks and
- 24 weeks.

These blood test results will help your doctor decide whether Valdoxan is suitable for you. Valdoxan may sometimes affect the results of these blood tests.

You may be at risk of liver problems if you are overweight, obese or have diabetes of if you are taking medicines known to affect your liver (ask your doctor if you are unsure which medicines these might be).

Seek advice from your doctor immediately if you develop signs of symptoms of potential liver problems (such as dark urine, light coloured faeces, yellow skin or eyes, pain in your upper right abdomen, new-onset and unexplained fatigue). Your doctor may advise you to stop taking Valdoxan.

**How to take Valdoxan**

The usual dose of Valdoxan is one tablet in the evening before bedtime. In some cases your doctor may prescribe two tablets (50mg) to be taken together in the evening at bedtime.

**How long to take it**

Current experience with medications to treat depression shows that treatment for six months or longer increases the likelihood of long-term recovery from a first episode of depression. For those who have previously had depression, a longer period of treatment will usually be recommended.

With Valdoxan, some people experience improvements in mood and sleep within two weeks of starting treatment. As people respond differently to medications, do not become discouraged if you do not notice a difference right away.

Continue taking Valdoxan until your doctor advises you to stop. Even when you are feeling better, your doctor would usually continue to give you Valdoxan for some time to help prevent your depression from returning.

Finally, if you have any questions or concerns while you are taking Valdoxan, it is important to speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

For more information refer to the Consumer Medicine Information: servier.com.au/products