

Patient information

MAOIs and diet

What are MAOIs?

MAOIs (monoamine oxidase inhibitors) are a certain class of medications. Some examples include moclobemide, phenelzine, isocarboxazid and tranylcypromine. Procarbazine is also a mild MAOI. Patients on the antibiotic linezolid should also follow a MAOI-type diet while taking this medicine and until at least two days after stopping linezolid.

Why do I need to make changes to my diet if I am taking MAOIs?

MAOIs work by preventing the breakdown of a substance called tyramine within the body. Some other drugs such as the antibiotic linezolid can have a similar effect (ask your pharmacist if you are unsure). If levels of tyramine rise too high, symptoms such as headaches, sweating, dizziness, nausea and vomiting, pain or stiffness in the neck and chest pain can occur as a result of a sudden rise in blood pressure (hypertensive crisis). By avoiding foods high in tyramine, it may be possible to prevent or reduce the risk of these adverse effects.

Where is tyramine found in my diet?

Tyramine is a naturally occurring substance that is present in a number of foods and drinks. It is found in foods that are fermented, aged, or spoiled. It is therefore important to ensure all food is as fresh as possible, and to discard or avoid foods if there is any doubt of freshness. Please see the table below for a detailed list.

How long do I need to follow this diet for?

These guidelines need to be followed while you are taking the medication. If you stop taking your medication at any stage, it is very important to continue following this guidance for 3 to 4 weeks (the time it takes for the medication to stop preventing breakdown of tyramine).

Food Group	Foods you can eat	Foods to avoid
Dairy products	Yoghurt (in limited amounts), cream cheese (in moderation), cottage cheese, ricotta, fresh cream, butter, margarine, milk, fresh eggs	Tinned milk, sour cream, processed cheese, cheddar, camembert, brie, stilton, gorgonzola, Danish blue, edam, gouda, emmental, gruyere, mozzarella, munster, mycelia, parmesan, Roquefort, any cheese containing foods e.g. cheese snacks (crisps containing cheese, Mini Cheddars®, cheesy biscuits), salad dressing, pizza, fondue, cheese sauces, etc.
Meat, fish, eggs, nuts and vegetarian alternatives	Fresh, frozen or tinned meats, poultry and fish, fresh eggs, plain textured vegetable protein, tofu, nuts not listed in right-hand column	Beef livers, chicken livers, liver pâté, chicken nuggets, caviar, smoked foods, miso, powdered protein supplements, pepperoni, cured meat (e.g. salami, mortadella and pastrami), hung or badly stored game, poultry or other meat that might be spoiling and matured pork in excess. Pickled, dried, fermented, smoked or salted fish and meat. Ready-made meat pies (particularly with gravy), black pudding, tinned fish, flavoured textured vegetable protein (e.g. Quorn®, flavoured soya "meat"), peanuts, brazil nuts and coconuts
Fruits and vegetables	All vegetables, including potatoes Most fruit and fruit juices	Sauerkraut, over-ripe figs, over-ripe avocados, over-ripe fruit, and <i>large quantities</i> of plums, spinach, or raspberries, pods of broad beans, skins of bananas, raisins
Cereals and cereal products	Bread, rice, pasta, chapatti, breakfast cereal, sweet or plain biscuits, cakes	Savoury baked products containing cheese or meat/yeast extract (e.g. cheese flavoured biscuits, Twiglets®, etc)
Stocks and gravies	Gravy made with Bisto Original® (powder not granules) or gravy browning, most vegetable stock cubes/powders and vegetable soup powders	Most gravy powders, all gravy granules, meat stock cubes and powders. All meat extracts (e.g. Oxo®, Bovril®), all yeast extracts (e.g. Marmite®), miso, soy sauce and shrimp paste

Food Group	Foods you can eat	Foods to avoid
	Curry powder (ensure this does not contain shrimp paste)	
Snack foods	Plain crisps, chocolate (safe in most cases, but very large amounts should be avoided), sweets, toffees	Flavoured salty products (e.g. flavoured crisps/savoury snacks) 'slimming' powders (e.g. Slimfast®)
Drinks	Preferably decaffeinated: tea and coffee, milky drinks, soft drinks (e.g. squash and fizzy drinks) Small quantities (i.e. 1 unit) of white wine, whiskey or clear spirits (e.g. gin and vodka)	Large amounts of white wine or spirits, red wine (including Chianti), bottled and canned beers and ales, beers on tap, vermouth, whisky, liqueurs, homemade beers and wines, champagne and sherry, alcohol-free beers and wines

Reactions for Procarbazine with food are extremely rare and if you want to eat or drink anything on the list you could try a little at a time, until you are sure it does not cause upset to you. It is however best to avoid alcohol altogether.

Patient information: warning signs of a reaction with MAOIs

If you experience any of the following symptoms, especially after eating, taking drugs of any type or if unexpected or severe, a reaction should be suspected and appropriate medical attention sought immediately: headache (especially at the back of the head), light headedness or dizziness, flushing of the face, pounding of the heart, numbness or stiffness in the neck, photophobia, chest pain or nausea and vomiting. It usually occurs within about two hours of ingestion of the compound.

If you have any further questions regarding the above dietary guidance on MAOIs and diet, please contact the dietetics department on 01284 713609. Speak to your GP or pharmacist if you are unsure whether the medication you are taking requires you to make any dietary changes.