



Patient Drug Education for Nitroglycerin Ointment

Nitroglycerin ointment (NTG) is often used to help heal anal fissures. The ointment relaxes the smooth muscle around the anus and promotes blood flow which helps heal the fissure (tear). The NTG reduces anal canal pressure, which diminishes pain and spasm. We prescribe a diluted concentration of NTG (.125%) compared to the 2% that is typically used for heart patients, and this is why you need to obtain the medication from a pharmacy that will compound your prescription.

Most of our patients use a compounded formula that also contains a local anesthetic, lidocaine. This preparation is custom-made for our patients at Porter's Compounding Pharmacy, near our 935 Beaver Grade Rd, Moon Twp, PA 15108 office. Phone (412) 264-2230.

The NTG ointment should be applied 2 or 4 times per day or as directed. A pea-sized drop should be placed on the tip of your gloved finger and then gently placed inside the anus. The finger should only be inserted up to the first knuckle. You may use Vaseline® to help coat the finger or dilute the ointment. If you are advised to mix the NTG with steroid ointment, limit the steroids to one to two weeks. The first few applications should be taken lying down, as mild light-headedness or a brief headache may occur.

It may take several weeks for the fissure to begin healing, and you will need to continue taking the medication after the resolution of your symptoms. It is essential to continue the treatment for the entire period – up to 3 months or as directed. The healing tissue takes up to two years to regain normal skin strength. You will be advised to add fiber to your diet, increase water intake to at least 4 glasses daily, take relaxing baths or sitz baths, and avoid prolonged sitting and straining on the commode.

Initially, the anal fissure is very inflamed, which allows more of the NTG to get into the blood. This increases the incidence of the most common side effect - a headache. It is usually brief and mild but may require Tylenol® or Advil®. You may dilute the NTG further with Vaseline® to decrease the headaches. As the treatment progresses and the fissure begins to heal, the headaches will tend to dissipate. Other side effects include lightheadedness, flushing, dizziness, nervousness, nausea, and vomiting. If any of these side effects persist or worsen, notify us promptly. Stop using the NTG and inform us immediately if you develop the rare side effects of severe dizziness, fainting, fast/pounding heartbeat, paleness, sweating, blurred vision, dry mouth, dark urine, bluish lips/skin/nails, unusual tiredness, severe weakness, irregular heartbeat, seizures, or chest pain. Severe allergic reactions are rare, but seek immediate medical attention if you develop a rash, swelling, dizziness, or trouble breathing.

Tell us if you are allergic to nitrates, have severe anemia, low blood pressure, dehydration, chronic heart failure, cardiomyopathy, recent heart attack, increased pressure in the brain, or exposure to nitrates while on the job. Do not use NTG while driving or working around machinery if you are tired, dizzy, lightheaded, or blurred vision. Limit alcoholic beverages. To minimize dizziness and lightheadedness, get up slowly when rising from a sitting or lying position. Older adults may be more prone to dizziness and falling. While there are no adequate studies to confirm the safety of NTG in pregnant or breastfeeding women, it has been used without incident so far. We recommend waiting at least one hour after applying the NTG ointment before breastfeeding.

Do not use NTG ointment if you are taking drugs for sexual problems [e.g., sildenafil (Viagra®), tadalafil (Cialis®), vardenafil (Levitra®)]. Use caution before taking cough-and-cold products because they may contain ingredients that could increase your blood pressure, cause a fast heartbeat, or increase chest pain (e.g., pseudoephedrine, phenylephrine, chlorpheniramine, diphenhydramine). Please tell us if you drink alcohol, take alteplase, migraine drugs (ergotamine), water pills/diuretics such as furosemide or hydrochlorothiazide, or other medicines for high blood pressure (beta-blockers, calcium channel blockers, ACE inhibitors).

Store the NTG at room temperature and keep away from light and moisture. Close the container tightly after each use. Keep away from children and pets. If you have any questions or problems, please call us at (412) 262-1000.