

Riluzole

Riluzole has been used since 1995 as a treatment for the neurologic condition amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, which causes severe muscle weakness. It is also known to bring about benefits in the brain that are helpful in depression, including strengthening and protecting brain cells. Riluzole works very similar to lamotrigine (Lamictal), a unique treatment for bipolar and recurrent depressions. For these reasons, riluzole has also been studied in people with severe depression (both bipolar and non-bipolar) and generalized anxiety that did not respond to other options. So far the results of these studies are promising but not definitive.

Riluzole has also been studied in obsessive compulsive disorder and trichotillomania (hair pulling); these results are also promising but not definitive.

How to take

Riluzole should be taken 1 hour before or 2 hours after a meal (food can reduce levels). Charcoal-broiled foods, broccoli, and brussel sprouts may also reduce levels.

Side effects

Riluzole is generally well tolerated. 14% of people taking riluzole stopped it because of side effects. The most common side effects are nausea, dizziness, diarrhea, abdominal pain, low appetite, changes in sensation and fatigue.

Serious side effects: rarely, riluzole impair the liver. It is safest to check liver function while taking it. There have been rare reports of blood cell count decreasing on the drug, but these effects were rare, mild and went away; riluzole is not known to have serious effects on blood count.

–Updated 11/27/2015 by Chris Aiken, MD

Quick facts

Brand name	Rilutek
Dose range	50-100mg daily
Sizes	> Tabs: 50mg
Release date	12/12/1995
FDA-approval	Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (a neurologic condition which causes degeneration of nerve cells; riluzole helps protect nerve cells).