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PSYCHIATRY

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PATIENT EDUCATION

Diazepam

Valium / Generic oral formulations / Separate seizure-rescue formulations

A guide for adults taking diazepam.
Follow the directions on your prescription and your provider's recommendations.

FOLLOW YOUR DOSE PLAN | AVOID ALCOHOL AND UNAPPROVED SEDATIVES

Formulations: Tablets and oral liquids are used for scheduled or specifically prescribed as-needed treatment. Nasal spray, rectal gel, and injectable formulations require their own instructions and training.

What it is used for

Diazepam is used for anxiety, muscle spasms, alcohol withdrawal, and certain seizures. Nasal and rectal rescue formulations have specific seizure-emergency instructions; they are different from a routine oral prescription.

How it works

It enhances GABA signaling, reducing nerve activity. Diazepam and active metabolites remain in the body for a long time, so sedation can accumulate over several days.

What to expect over time

Effects can begin after the first dose. The timing and duration depend on the formulation and dose. Sleepiness or impaired coordination may last longer than the relief you notice.

Your provider should review whether ongoing treatment is helping and whether the dose or duration should change. Do not increase the dose when the effect seems weaker.

Taking your medication

- Follow the schedule for your exact formulation and reason for treatment.
- Measure oral liquid with the provided device. Do not use oral missed-dose instructions for seizure rescue.
- If you miss a dose, take it when you remember unless it is almost time for the next dose. Then skip it. Do not double a dose.
- For rescue treatment, follow the written seizure plan, including when to call 911.

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DIAZEPAM / 02

Side effects and safety

Possible side effects

- Sleepiness, slowed reactions, or fatigue
- Dizziness, poor balance, or falls
- Memory problems or difficulty concentrating

Keeping track of treatment

Some side effects resolve with time; others may require a change of medication. Discuss persistent or bothersome side effects with your provider.

Watch for daytime sedation, falls, memory changes, and breathing problems. Older adults and people taking other sedatives may be more sensitive.

Physical dependence can develop with regular use. Sudden stopping or a rapid reduction can cause severe withdrawal, including seizures. Dependence is different from addiction, but misuse and addiction are also possible.

If you take too much

For a suspected overdose, call Poison Control at **1-800-222-1222** immediately, even if you feel well. Call 911 for a seizure, collapse, trouble breathing, or inability to wake.

Before you start

Discuss sleep apnea, lung disease, liver or kidney disease, glaucoma, falls, and any history of substance use problems. Tell your provider about all opioids and other sedatives.

Discuss pregnancy, pregnancy plans, and breastfeeding with your provider. Treatment decisions should consider both the medication and the condition being treated.

Discuss significant liver disease and myasthenia gravis.

Medicines and interactions

Review all your medications with your provider, including over-the-counter medicines and supplements. Have new medications checked before taking them.

Combining a benzodiazepine with an opioid can cause profound sedation, slowed breathing, coma, or death. Use such combinations only under a specifically reviewed treatment plan.

Avoid alcohol. Sleeping pills, sedating antihistamines, muscle relaxants, and other sedatives can increase impairment and breathing risks.

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DIAZEPAM / 03

Living with your treatment

When to get help

Emergency symptoms. Call 911 for slow or difficult breathing, inability to wake, collapse, or a seizure. Severe confusion or hallucinations after reducing or stopping may be dangerous withdrawal.

Prompt medical advice. Contact your provider promptly for repeated falls, marked memory problems, unusual aggression, or needing more medication to get the same effect.

If you feel unsafe or have thoughts of self-harm, call 911 or go to an emergency department.

Your questions answered

Can I stop after taking it regularly?
Consult with your provider before reducing or stopping. A gradual, individualized taper helps limit withdrawal. Do not borrow medication or change the schedule to manage withdrawal yourself.

What if I feel unusually agitated?
Some people develop disinhibition, irritability, or agitation. Contact your provider rather than taking an extra dose.

Everyday tips

Do not drive until you know how the medication affects you. Avoid driving whenever sleepy or impaired.

Keep medication locked away. Never share it, even with someone who has similar symptoms.

Arrange refills or taper instructions before you run out.

Storage and safety

Keep medication in its labeled container, away from excess heat and moisture and out of reach of children and pets. Do not share it. Ask a pharmacy about disposal of unused medication.

Sources

MedlinePlus: Diazepam

Educational handout; does not replace your prescription or provider's recommendations.