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PATIENT EDUCATION

Tetrabenazine

Xenazine / Generic tablets / VMAT2 inhibitor

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

FOLLOW THE GRADUAL DOSE INCREASE

REPORT NEW OR WORSENING DEPRESSION

Formulations: Tablets are available in 12.5 mg and 25 mg strengths. The total dose is increased gradually and may be divided across the day. Do not substitute deutetrabenazine or valbenazine; they have different dosing instructions.

What it is used for

Tetrabenazine treats chorea, the involuntary movements associated with Huntington disease. It reduces movements but does not cure Huntington disease or treat all of its thinking and mood symptoms. Other uses require a separate discussion with your provider.

How it works

Tetrabenazine inhibits VMAT2, a protein that packages chemical messengers into storage vesicles in nerve cells. Reducing dopamine release can lessen excessive movement, but it can also cause slowing, stiffness, and mood effects.

What to expect over time

Movement benefit and side effects are reviewed as the dose increases. The goal is easier daily functioning with tolerable side effects, rather than eliminating every movement.

Movements may return quickly when treatment stops. Keep refill and follow-up plans current.

Taking your medication

- Take with or without food at the times prescribed.
- Follow the gradual dose increases. Do not increase sooner because movements are still present.
- 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.
- If you have missed more than five days, contact your provider before restarting. The dose needs to be built up again.

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Side effects and safety

Possible side effects

- Sleepiness or fatigue
- Restlessness, anxiety, or trouble sleeping
- Nausea
- Slowed movement, stiffness, or balance problems

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.

Tetrabenazine carries a boxed warning for depression and suicidal thoughts or behavior in people with Huntington disease. Review mood and behavior closely, especially after starting or changing a dose.

Your provider also checks movement, swallowing, alertness, and heart-rhythm risk. CYP2D6 genetic testing is required before prescribing more than 50 mg a day. Results and interacting medicines affect the dose limit.

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

Do not use with active suicidal thoughts, untreated or inadequately treated depression, liver impairment, or certain interacting medicines.

Discuss previous depression, suicide attempts, heart-rhythm problems, fainting, Parkinson-like symptoms, and swallowing difficulty.

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

Medicines and interactions

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

Do not combine with an MAOI; a 14-day separation is required. After reserpine, wait at least 20 days before starting tetrabenazine. These switches need provider direction.

Do not combine with deutetrabenazine or valbenazine. Strong CYP2D6 inhibitors, including fluoxetine and paroxetine, require lower dose limits.

Antipsychotics can add stiffness, restlessness, or serious movement reactions. Alcohol, sedatives, and QT-prolonging medicines add other risks.

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TETRABENAZINE / 03

Living with your treatment

When to get help

Emergency symptoms. Get emergency care for fever with severe stiffness and confusion, collapse with an irregular heartbeat, or trouble breathing. These can signal a serious reaction.

Prompt medical advice. Contact your provider promptly for new depression, marked restlessness, significant slowing, falls, or difficulty swallowing. Any suicidal thinking needs immediate attention.

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

Your questions answered

What if the movements improve but I feel slowed down?
Tell your provider. Reduced movement is helpful only if the balance of benefit and side effects improves daily life. A dose adjustment may be needed.

Why involve a family member or caregiver?
Someone close to you may notice withdrawal, irritability, sadness, or swallowing changes before you recognize them. Agree on what they should report.

Can I change my other psychiatric medicine?
Consult with your provider. Antidepressants and antipsychotics can affect tetrabenazine dosing and risks; changes should be coordinated.

Everyday tips

Track practical goals such as eating, speaking, walking, and dressing.

Stand up slowly and avoid driving when drowsy or impaired.

Keep mood follow-up appointments even when movement symptoms improve.

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

DailyMed: Tetrabenazine prescribing information and Medication Guide (2026)

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