

## Alprazolam (pron. Al-praz-o-lamb)

### What is alprazolam used for?

Alprazolam (also known as Xanax<sup>®</sup>) is mainly used to help treat the symptoms of anxiety. It can also be used to help the symptoms of panic and social anxiety. It is known as a benzodiazepine. It is made as tablets.

### What is the usual dose of alprazolam?

The usual dose of alprazolam in adults for anxiety is 250mcg to 500mcg (0.25-0.5mg) three times a day. In older people the dose should be a bit lower e.g. 250mcg (0.25mg) two or three times a day.

### How should I take alprazolam?

Swallow the tablets with at least half a glass of water whilst sitting or standing. This is to make sure that they reach the stomach and do not stick in your throat.

### When should I take alprazolam?

Take your alprazolam as directed on the label. Try to take it at regular times each day. Taking it at mealtimes may make it easier for you to remember as there is no problem about taking alprazolam with or after food.

### What are the alternatives to alprazolam?

There are many other medicines (e.g. SSRIs), talking therapies and treatments for anxiety and other symptoms. See our "Handy chart" to help you compare the medicines, how they work and their side effects.

### How long will alprazolam take to start to work?

For anxiety, alprazolam usually starts to work in about an hour. The effect may then build over several days or weeks.

### How long will I need to keep taking alprazolam for?

This will depend on what you are taking it for. It may only need to be for a few weeks, or it could be much longer. Discuss this with your doctor or nurse.

### Can I stop taking alprazolam suddenly?

It is unwise to stop taking it suddenly, even if you feel better. Your symptoms can return if treatment is stopped too early. This may occur some weeks after alprazolam has been stopped. When the time comes, you should stop alprazolam by a gradual reduction in the dose over several weeks or longer. You could also get some withdrawal or discontinuation effects.

### Is alprazolam addictive?

You could become dependent on alprazolam. It can produce some withdrawal or discontinuation symptoms in some people who have taken it regularly every day for more than about 4 to 6 weeks. About 1 in 3 people get no symptoms, about 1 in 3 get some that last for a few weeks, and about 1 in 3 people get more marked symptoms. In the worst cases the symptoms from stopping alprazolam quickly could include anxiety, tension, panic attacks, poor concentration, difficulty in sleeping, nausea, trembling, palpitations, sweating and pains and stiffness in your face, head and neck (not unlike anxiety itself). These could occur several days after stopping alprazolam. They may last from one to three weeks but can go on for months. If you have taken alprazolam for a long time you should stop it slowly over several weeks or months. This is best done by reducing your dose a little every few weeks and this will reduce the chances of withdrawal effects. It is also true to say that many people get no withdrawal symptoms when they stop alprazolam, even if they have been taking it for many years. You should make sure that you talk about this with your doctor.

### What should I do if I forget to take a dose of alprazolam?

Take the missed dose as soon as you remember unless it is within about 3-4 hours of your next dose. If you remember after this just take the next dose as normal. Do not try to catch up by taking two doses at once as you may get more side-effects. If you have problems remembering your doses (as very many people do) ask your pharmacist, doctor or nurse about this. There are some special packs that can be used to help you remember.

### Can I drink alcohol while I am taking alprazolam?

If you drink alcohol while taking alprazolam it may make you feel more sleepy. This is really important if you need to drive or operate machinery and you must seek advice on this.

## Will alprazolam affect my other medication?

Alprazolam has only a few interactions with other medicines.

- The effect of alprazolam can be decreased by caffeine (e.g. in tea, coffee, cola drinks, some energy drinks), theophylline or aminophylline (for asthma)
- If alprazolam is taken with alcohol, it will cause more sleepiness. You may also feel more sleepy if you take alprazolam with anything else that causes sleepiness e.g. some antihistamines, antidepressants, pain killers, antipsychotics, anticonvulsants and many other medicines
- You should have no problems with "The Contraceptive Pill" and alprazolam

Not all of these interactions happen in everyone. Some of these medicines can still be used together but you will need to follow your doctor's instructions carefully. There are many other possible drug interactions.

## What sort of side-effects might I get if I am taking alprazolam?

The table below will show you some of the main side effects you might get from alprazolam.

Side effect	What happens	What to do about it
<b>COMMON</b> ( <i>more than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i> )		
Sleepiness	You feel sleepy or sluggish. It can last for a few hours after taking a dose, or longer.	Don't drive or use machinery. Discuss with your doctor if you can take your alprazolam at different times of the day.
Dizziness	Feeling light-headed and faint.	Don't stand up too quickly. Try and lie or sit down if you feel it coming on. Don't drive.
<b>LESS COMMON</b> ( <i>less than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i> )		
Ataxia	Being unsteady on your feet.	Discuss with your doctor when you next see him or her.
<b>RARE</b> ( <i>less than about 1 in 100 people might get these</i> )		
Aggression	Feeling excitable. You may be over-talkative, intrusive, unfriendly or disinhibited.	Discuss this with your doctor. He or she may want to adjust your medicine or dose.
Headache	Your head is pounding and painful.	Try paracetamol. Your pharmacist will be able to advise if this is safe to take with any other medicines you may be taking.
Confusion	Your mind is all mixed up or confused.	Discuss with your doctor when you next see him or her. He or she may want to adjust your medicine or dose.
Postural hypotension	Low blood pressure. This can make you feel dizzy, particularly when you stand up.	Don't stand up too quickly. If you feel dizzy, don't drive.
Amnesia	Loss of short-term memory. Finding it hard to remember things.	It is not dangerous. Discuss with your doctor if you are worried.
Rashes	Blotches seen on the skin.	Stop taking alprazolam and see your doctor now.

Do not be worried by this list of side effects. Some people get no side effects at all and others may get some effects that are not listed in this table. If you think you might have a side effect to your medicine, you should ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. If you want to know more, go to our website for links to other websites with more information.

## Will I need a blood test if I am taking alprazolam?

You will not need to have any blood tests to check on alprazolam.

## Can I drive or cycle while I am taking alprazolam?

You may feel a bit sleepy at first when taking alprazolam. Until this wears off, or you know how alprazolam affects you, do not drive or operate machinery. You should be careful as it may affect your reaction times.

**The small print:** This leaflet is to help you understand about your medicine. You should also read the manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet (PIL). You may find lots more on the internet but beware as internet-based information is not always accurate. Do not share medicines with anyone else. Go to our website for fuller answers to these and many other questions e.g. driving, women's health, how it works, doses and interactions, and about the conditions. The "Handy charts" will help you compare the main medicines for each condition, how they work and their side effects.