

Clonazepam (pron. clon-a-zee-pam)

What is clonazepam used for?

Clonazepam (also known as Rivotril[®]) is mainly used to help treat epileptic seizures or fits, often with other anticonvulsants. It can also be used to help the symptoms of anxiety and as a sedative. It is one of a group of medicines called the benzodiazepines. It is made as tablets and an injection.

What is the usual dose of clonazepam?

The usual dose of clonazepam is around 4-8mg a day for epilepsy. The dose for anxiety is usually much lower.

How should I take clonazepam?

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 clonazepam?

Take your clonazepam as directed on the medicine 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 clonazepam with or after food. If the dose is once a day it may be best to take it at night, as it may make you feel sleepy.

What are the alternatives to clonazepam?

This will depend on what you are taking it for. There are many other anticonvulsants and treatments for epilepsy, and medicines (e.g. SSRIs) and talking therapies for anxiety.

How long will clonazepam take to start to work?

This will depend on what you are taking it for, but generally in a few days or so. Please look at one of the "Handy charts" for more help and advice on how long you might need to take it for.

How long will I need to keep taking clonazepam for?

This will depend on what you are taking it for.

Is clonazepam addictive?

You could become dependent on clonazepam. This is unlikely if you are taking it only for epilepsy but 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 clonazepam 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 clonazepam. They may last from one to three weeks but can go on for months, and are more likely with alcohol dependence. If you have taken clonazepam 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 will reduce the chance of withdrawal effects. It is also true to say that many people get no withdrawal symptoms when they stop clonazepam, even if they have been taking it for many years. You should thus make sure that you discuss your particular treatment with your doctor.

Can I stop taking clonazepam 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 or even many months after clonazepam has been stopped. When the time comes, you should withdraw clonazepam by a gradual reduction in the dose over several weeks or longer. You should discuss this fully with your doctor. The main problem may be your symptoms coming back.

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

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, boxes and devices that can be used to help you remember.

Can I drink alcohol while I am taking clonazepam?

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

Will clonazepam affect my other medication?

Clonazepam has only a few interactions with other medicines.

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

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 occur if I am taking clonazepam?

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

Side effect	What happens	What to do about it
COMMON (<i>more than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Drowsiness	You feel sleepy or sluggish. It can last for a few hours after taking your dose, or longer.	Don't drive or use machinery. Discuss with your doctor if you can take your clonazepam at a different time 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.
LESS COMMON (<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.
RARE (<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. Difficulty in remembering.	It is not dangerous. Discuss with your doctor if you are worried.
Rashes	Blotches seen on the skin.	Stop taking clonazepam 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 clonazepam?

You should not need to have a blood test to check on clonazepam.

Can I drive or cycle while I am taking clonazepam?

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

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.