

Diazepam (pron. die-az-e-pam)

What is diazepam used for?

Diazepam (also known as Valium[®]) 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, syrup, injection, suppositories and rectal tubes (although the last two are usually just used for epilepsy).

What is the usual dose of diazepam?

The usual dose of diazepam is around 2-5mg one to three times a day.

How should I take diazepam?

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. For the liquid, use a dropper or a medicine spoon. Use it carefully to make sure you measure the correct amount.

When should I take diazepam?

Take your diazepam 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 diazepam with or after food.

What are the alternatives to diazepam?

This will depend on what you are taking it for. There are many other medicines (e.g. SSRIs), talking therapies and treatments for anxiety. See our "Handy charts" to help you compare the medicines, how they work and their side effects.

How long will diazepam take to start to work?

Diazepam usually starts to work in about an hour. The effect may build over several days or weeks. Please look at one of the "Handy charts" for more help and advice.

How long will I need to keep taking diazepam for?

This will depend on what you are taking it for. Please look one of at the "Handy charts" for more help and advice.

Is diazepam addictive?

You could become dependent on diazepam. 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 diazepam 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 diazepam. 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 diazepam 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 diazepam, 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 diazepam 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 diazepam has been stopped. When the time comes, you should withdraw diazepam by a gradual reduction in the dose over several weeks or longer. You should discuss this fully with your doctor.

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

Take the missed dose as soon as you remember unless it is within about 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 diazepam?

If you drink alcohol while taking diazepam 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 diazepam affect my other medication?

Diazepam has only a few interactions with other medicines.

- The effect of diazepam can be decreased by caffeine (e.g. in tea, coffee, cola drinks, some energy drinks), theophylline or aminophylline (for asthma)
- If diazepam is taken with alcohol, it will cause more sleepiness. You will also get more sleepiness if you take diazepam 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 diazepam

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 diazepam?

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

Side effect	What happens	What to do about it
COMMON (<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 your dose, or longer.	Don't drive or use machinery. Discuss with your doctor if you can take your diazepam 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, 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 diazepam 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 diazepam?

You will not need to have a blood test to check on diazepam.

Can I drive or cycle while I am taking diazepam?

You may feel a bit sleepy at first when taking diazepam. You should be careful as it may slow down your reaction times. Until this wears off, or you know how diazepam 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.