

Olanzapine (pron. o-lanz-a-pean)

What is olanzapine used for?

Olanzapine (also known as Zyprexa[®]) is mainly used to help treat the symptoms of psychosis, schizophrenia, bipolar mania and in a crisis. It also helps stop these symptoms coming back. It is sometimes also used to help the symptoms of ADHD, depression, OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) and other conditions. It is sometimes known as an atypical antipsychotic. Olanzapine is made as tablets, melt-in-the-mouth tablets and a short-acting injection. It is also made as a long-acting injection (Zypadhera[®], see a separate PILL)

What is the usual dose of olanzapine?

The usual dose of olanzapine is around 10-20mg a day. It should be much lower in older people.

How should I take olanzapine?

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 melt-in-the-mouth tablets, just put them on your tongue and they will dissolve quickly.

When should I take olanzapine?

Take your olanzapine as directed on the medicine label. Taking it at mealtimes may make it easier for you to remember as there is no problem about taking olanzapine with or after food. If the label says to take it once a day this may be best at bedtime as it may make you drowsy at first.

What are the alternatives to olanzapine?

This will depend on what you are taking it for. There are many other antipsychotics and medicines, talking therapies and treatments for psychosis, schizophrenia, mood disorders and other conditions. See our "Handy charts" to help you compare the medicines, how they work and their side effects.

How long will olanzapine take to work?

This will depend on what you are taking it for. It will usually start to work in a couple of weeks and the effect should build over the next few weeks. Please look at one of the "Handy charts" for more help and advice.

How long will I need to keep taking olanzapine for?

This will depend on what you are taking it for. It could be for months or years to help stop your symptoms coming back. Please look at one of the "Handy charts" for more help and advice.

Is olanzapine addictive?

Olanzapine is not addictive.

Can I stop taking olanzapine 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 months after olanzapine has been stopped. When the time comes, you should withdraw olanzapine by a gradual reduction in the dose over several weeks. You should discuss this fully with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

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

Take the missed dose as soon as you remember unless it is within about 12 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 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 olanzapine?

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

Olanzapine has only a few interactions with other medicines:

- The effects of olanzapine can sometimes be increased by fluvoxamine
- The effects of olanzapine can be decreased by smoking
- If olanzapine is taken with benzodiazepines (e.g. diazepam, lorazepam, temazepam), sleeping tablets or alcohol, it will cause more sleepiness
- You should have no problems with "The Contraceptive Pill" and olanzapine

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 olanzapine?

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

Side effect	What happens	What to do about it
VERY COMMON (<i>more than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Sleepiness	Feeling sleepy or sluggish. It can last for a few hours after taking your dose.	Don't drive or use machinery.
Weight gain	Eating more and putting on weight, especially just after you start olanzapine.	A diet full of vegetables and fibre may help prevent weight gain.
COMMON (<i>less than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Postural hypotension	A low blood pressure - this can make you feel dizzy, especially when you stand up.	Try not to stand up too quickly. If you feel dizzy, don't drive. It usually wears off in a few days.
Dry mouth	Not much saliva or spit.	Suck sugar-free gum or boiled sweets. If it is bad, your doctor can give you a mouth spray. It usually wears off in a few days.
Constipation	When you want to poop but can't (the opposite of diarrhoea). You can't pass a motion.	Make sure you eat enough fibre or bran or fruit. Make sure you are drinking enough fluid, keep active and get some exercise e.g. walking. If this does not help, ask your doctor or pharmacist for a mild laxative. It usually wears off in a few weeks.
Peripheral oedema	When your ankles swell up.	Discuss with your doctor.
Diabetes	You may lose weight, pass lots of urine, and feel thirsty and hungry all the time.	Tell your doctor if you get these symptoms. You can then have some simple tests to see if you are getting diabetes.
RARE (<i>less than about 1 in 100 people might get these</i>)		
Altered liver function	Your liver is not working as normal. You should not feel any symptoms. This is only discovered if your doctor does a blood test.	Continue to take your olanzapine. Your liver should return to normal after a while. Your doctor will probably want to do regular blood tests to make sure your liver is O.K.
Photosensitivity	Skin goes blotchy in the sun.	Avoid direct sunlight or sun-lamps. Use a high factor sun block cream.

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 olanzapine?

You may sometimes need to have a blood test, to check on some possible side effects e.g. blood sugar or cholesterol levels.

Can I drive or cycle while I am taking olanzapine?

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