

Promethazine (pron. pro-meth-a-zeen)

What is promethazine used for?

Promethazine is an antihistamine, and is often used to help hay fever and allergies. However, it is also quite sedative and can be taken at night to help people sleep. It is made as tablets and a liquid. It can be bought "over-the-counter" from some pharmacies as e.g. Phenergan®.

What is the usual dose of promethazine?

The usual dose of promethazine for sleep in adults is around 25-50mg at night.

How should I take promethazine?

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 medicine spoon or oral syringe.

When should I take promethazine?

Take your promethazine about 20 minutes before going to bed.

What are the alternatives to promethazine?

There are many other medicines (e.g. 'Z hypnotics'), talking therapies and treatments for insomnia, and the causes of insomnia. See our "Handy charts" to help you compare the medicines, how they work and their side effects.

How long will promethazine take to work?

Usually there will be some effect within about 20-30 minutes. The effect can last for up to 12 hours.

How long will I need to keep taking promethazine for?

It is not a good idea to take it every night as the effect may start to wear off, but you can take it for as long as you need it to help you sleep.

Is promethazine addictive?

Promethazine is not addictive.

Can I stop taking promethazine suddenly?

Yes. Some people get something called "rebound insomnia" when they stop a hypnotic. This means they find it even more difficult to get to sleep than before. It is best to take promethazine only when you need it.

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

This is not really a problem.

Can I drink alcohol while I am taking promethazine?

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

Promethazine has a few interactions with other medicines. Promethazine has many side effects. If it is taken with other medicines with the same side effects, then a combined effect can occur.

- Promethazine can have more side effects (such as dry mouth, blurred vision, constipation and difficulty passing urine) if taken with tricyclics (e.g. imipramine, dothiepin/dosulepin) or anticholinergics (e.g. procyclidine or orphenadrine)
- Promethazine can also lead to false results in pregnancy tests
- Promethazine can be quite sedative, so be careful with sleeping tablets, tricyclics (e.g. dosulepin, imipramine, lofepramine), older antihistamines (e.g. promethazine), benzodiazepines (e.g. diazepam, lorazepam, temazepam), phenobarbital, melatonin or alcohol.
- You should have no problems with "The Contraceptive Pill" and promethazine

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 promethazine?

The table below will show you some of the main side effects you might get from promethazine. The dose to help people sleep is fairly low so these should not cause you too many problems.

Side effect	What happens	What to do about it
FAIRLY COMMON (<i>more than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Hangover	You feel sleepy or sluggish the next morning.	If you feel like this for more than a week after starting promethazine, tell your doctor. Don't drive or use machinery. Discuss this with your doctor as there are some sleeping tablets that are less likely to do this.
Dizziness	You may feel faint when you stand up.	Try not to stand up too quickly. If you feel dizzy, don't drive. Discuss with your doctor when you next see him or her.
Restlessness	Being more on edge and not able to lie still.	If this does not wear off, you might need to try something else to help you sleep.
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.
Nightmares	Vivid dreams	These can be upsetting but not dangerous as such. If this does not wear off, you might need to try something else to help you sleep.
Tiredness	Being weary, especially the next morning	This might mean your dose is too high. Try a lower dose.
Anticholinergic effects	Blurred vision, constipation, dry mouth	Do not drive with blurred vision. This may wear off after a few hours. See your doctor about this if it does not.

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 promethazine?

Some people who need to take higher doses occasionally need a blood test e.g. to check on some possible side effects such as prolactin levels, blood sugar etc. You might also need your blood pressure tested.

Can I drive or cycle while I am taking promethazine?

You may feel sleepy and have slower reactions at first when taking promethazine. Until this wears off, or you know how promethazine 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.