

Propranolol for anxiety (pron. pro-pran-o-loll)

What is propranolol used for?

Propranolol is a beta-blocker and can be used in lower doses to help the symptoms of anxiety. It does this by reducing your heart rate a little so it helps stop the feelings of anxiety and panic. It is sometimes also used to help the symptoms of high blood pressure, angina and other heart problems. It is made as tablets, capsules, slow release capsules and a syrup. Oxprenolol (another beta-blocker) is also sometimes used.

What is the usual dose of propranolol?

The usual dose of propranolol for anxiety is around 10-40mg three times a day.

How should I take propranolol?

Swallow the tablets or capsules 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, dropper or oral syringe. Use it carefully to make sure you measure the correct amount.

When should I take propranolol?

Take your propranolol 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 propranolol with or after food.

What are the alternatives to propranolol?

This will depend on what you are taking it for. There are many other medicines (e.g. SSRIs, oxprenolol), 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 propranolol take to work?

For anxiety, the effect will start in a few hours. Please look at one of the "Handy charts" for more help and advice on how long you might need to take it for before it works.

How long will I need to keep taking propranolol for?

This will depend on what you are taking it for. For anxiety, it will be for as long as you think you want or need it for. Please look at one of the "Handy charts" for more help and advice.

Is propranolol addictive?

Propranolol is not addictive as such.

Can I stop taking propranolol 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 propranolol has been stopped. When the time comes, you should withdraw propranolol 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 propranolol?

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 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.

Will propranolol affect my other medication?

Propranolol has only a few interactions with other medicines:

- Make sure your doctor knows about any heart, breathing, thyroid or diabetic problems you have had in the past e.g. you should not normally take a beta-blocker if you have asthma.
- Propranolol can interact with some other drugs e.g. for high blood pressure, glaucoma and some antidepressants
- You should have no problems with "The Contraceptive Pill" and propranolol.

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.

Can I drink alcohol while I am taking propranolol?

If you drink alcohol it might slightly reduce the effect of propranolol.

What sort of side-effects might occur if I am taking propranolol?

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

Side effect	What happens	What to do about it
COMMON (<i>less than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Fatigue	You feel tired all the time. This may happen early on in treatment and should go away.	If you feel like this for more than a week after starting propranolol, tell your doctor. It may be possible to adjust your dose slightly.
Cold extremities	Your toes and fingers feel cold.	This may happen early on in treatment and should go away. If you feel like this for more than a week after starting propranolol, tell your doctor. It may be possible to adjust your dose slightly.
UNCOMMON (<i>less than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Stomach upset	This includes feeling sick and getting diarrhoea (the runs).	If you feel like this for more than a week after starting propranolol, tell your doctor.
Sleep disturbances	You can't sleep very well and may have nightmares	If you feel like this for more than a week after starting propranolol, tell your doctor.
Dizziness	Feeling light-headed and faint, especially when you stand up.	Don't stand up too quickly. Try and lie down when you feel it coming on. Don't drive. Let your doctor know next time you meet.
Wheeziness	When you find it difficult to breathe, and your chest feels tight.	This may happen if you have asthma. Contact your doctor now.
Bradycardia	A very slow pulse rate (under 50 beats per minute).	Contact your doctor now.
RARE (<i>less than about 1 in 100 people might get these</i>)		
Skin trouble	For example, a rash or itching that you haven't had before.	Contact your doctor now.
Dry eyes	Your eyes feel dry or sore.	Contact 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 propranolol?

You should not need a blood test while you are taking propranolol.

Can I drive or cycle while I am taking propranolol?

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