

Alpha-Blockers for PTSD

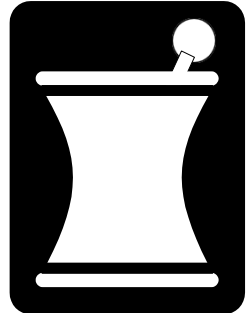
Patient Information - Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy

Why have I been prescribed doxazosin or prazosin ?

Alpha-blockers have several uses. They are traditionally used to treat high blood pressure or to improve urinary flow for patients with an enlarged prostate.

There is a small but growing evidence base to show that alpha-blockers can help improve sleep and reduce the nightmares associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This should make you feel better, reduce stress and improve alertness. This is an “off label” or unlicensed use of alpha blockers.

PTSD is treated in many ways, including taking antidepressants and antipsychotics. Certain “talking” therapies are also effective in PTSD. Alpha blockers are used as one part of a medication regime to help reduce the symptoms of PTSD.



What exactly are alpha-blockers?

Prazosin (praz-o-sin) and doxazosin (dox-as-o-sin), belong to a class of medications called ‘alpha-blockers.’ They act by blocking alpha-1 receptors in the brain which is thought to lead to better, deeper sleep.

Alpha-blockers have been around for many years now. There is a lot of experience using them and millions of patients have taken these medicines for blood pressure and for those with enlarged prostates. Many people have found alpha blockers safe and effective in reducing nightmares and has helped them to lead more normal lives.

Are doxazosin or prazosin safe to take?

It is usually safe to take these medications regularly as prescribed by your doctor, but they don’t suit everyone. Let your doctor know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care may be needed:

- If you have postural hypotension (low blood pressure when you stand up quickly), a condition called micturition syncope, or suffer from heart or liver trouble.
- If you are taking other medicines including other medicines for blood pressure.
- If you have recently had or are planning to have cataract or eye surgery.
- If you are pregnant, breastfeeding, or wish to become pregnant.

What should I do if I miss a dose?

Never change your dose or stop taking these medications without checking with your doctor. If you forget to take a dose, take it as soon as you remember, as long as it is within a few hours of the usual time.

What will happen to me when I start taking doxazosin or prazosin?

Your doctor will start you on a very low dose of your alpha blocker and increase it slowly to achieve the correct dose for you.

Be particularly careful when taking the first dose of doxazosin or prazosin, because it may lower your blood pressure. This may cause you to feel dizzy, faint and potentially fall over. To avoid this, it is best to have the first dose when you are sitting in bed, just before you go to sleep. Try not to get up after this until the morning, but if you then have to stand up, do so slowly when getting out of bed or even from a sitting position, since your blood pressure can be lower than normal.

The nightmares should go away, and your sleep improve, although this may take a few days. The full effect of the medication may take a week or more to come about.

Do **NOT** drive until you know how these medicines effect you.

You might notice some side effects from the medication. Most of these should go away after a week or so. Look at the table below. It tells you what to do if you get any side effects. Not everyone will get the side effects shown. There are many other possible side effects. Ask your pharmacist, doctor or nurse if you are worried about anything else that you think might be a side effect.

Are there any medicines that I should avoid or take care with?

Always tell your doctor what medicines you are taking and ask your pharmacist if there are any interactions with your medicines before you buy any new 'over-the-counter' medicines.

What about alcohol?

Drinking alcohol can make PTSD symptoms worse, in particular, anger, depression and poor sleep. It is best to not drink too much alcohol or even better avoid alcohol altogether. Alcohol can also make you dehydrated and increase the chances of having low blood pressure and falls.

When I feel better, can I stop taking them?

You and your doctor should discuss together when it is suitable to come off these medicines. It is unwise to come off these medicines suddenly as this can cause your blood pressure to increase. This risk is minimised by slowly reducing your dose over a period of time as suggested by your doctor.

Remember, leaflets like this can only describe some of the effects of medication. You may also find other books or leaflets useful. If you have access to the internet, you may find a lot of information there as well. Be careful as internet-based information is not always accurate.

SIDE EFFECT	WHAT IS IT?	WHAT SHOULD I DO IF THIS HAPPENS TO ME?
Common		
Headache	Tightness or pain in the head and neck	If you have a headache for more than a week after starting the medication, tell your doctor.
Fatigue and Weakness	You feel tired all the time and your muscles feel weak.	This may happen early on in treatment and should go away. If you feel like this for more than a week after starting the medication, tell your doctor.
Dizziness	Feeling light-headed and faint, especially when you stand up. This most commonly occurs when doses increase or you start this medication.	Don't stand up too quickly from sitting or lying down. Try and sit or lie down when you feel it coming on. Don't drive. Take the dose at night before bed. Contact your doctor if this occurs and is severe.
Dry Mouth	Not much spit or saliva in your mouth. Dry mouth can cause problems with speech, taste, chewing and swallowing. It can also the increase the risk of getting dental decay and infection in your mouth.	To help prevent dental problems sip water regularly to moisten your mouth. Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. Avoid sugary drinks and snacks between meals. Try sugar free chewing gum to stimulate saliva or discuss using an oral lubricant with your pharmacist or Dentist.
Stomach Upset	This includes feeling sick, throwing up and loose bowel motions.	If you feel like this for more than a week after starting the medication, tell your doctor.
Tachycardia or Unusual Heartbeat	A very fast pulse, racing heart or unusual heartbeat.	Contact your doctor now.
Depression	Feeling miserable and low in mood.	Contact your doctor now.
Blurred Vision	Blurred vision or noticing that you can't see as clearly	Contact your doctor now.
Nausea	Feeling sick in the stomach and wanting to throw up.	If you feel like this for more than a week after starting the medication, tell your doctor.
Rare		
Painful Erection	An erection that will not go away after 4 hours. This may or may not occur during sexual intercourse	Contact your doctor now.
Skin trouble or Rashes, Trouble Breathing	For example, a rash or itching that you have not had before, you find it hard to breath and experience swelling of the face or throat	Contact your doctor now.

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