

# Olanzapine (o-lan-za-peen)

## Patient Information - Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy

### Why have I been prescribed olanzapine?

Olanzapine is an antipsychotic used to treat schizophrenia and psychosis.

A person diagnosed with schizophrenia or psychosis may hear voices talking to them or about them. They may also become suspicious or paranoid. Some people also have problems with their thinking and feel that other people can read their thoughts. These are called “positive symptoms”. Olanzapine can help to relieve these symptoms.

Many people with schizophrenia also experience “negative symptoms”. They feel tired and lacking in energy and may become quite inactive and withdrawn. Olanzapine may help relieve these symptoms as well.

Olanzapine is also used for treating mania and as a mood stabiliser in bipolar affective disorder.

Olanzapine is sometimes prescribed for people who have had side effects such as strange movements and shaking with older types of antipsychotics. Olanzapine does not usually cause these effects. Older antipsychotics may also increase levels of the hormone prolactin which can lead to either less interest in sex or problems having sex. Olanzapine does not usually increase prolactin.

### What exactly is olanzapine?

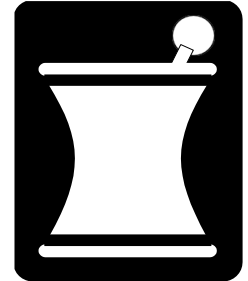
Olanzapine is one of a group of medicines used to treat schizophrenia and similar conditions. These illnesses are sometimes referred to as psychoses. That is why the name given to this group of medicines is “antipsychotics”.

Olanzapine is a newer type of antipsychotic and has been available since 1996. It works differently and has different side effects from older antipsychotics.

Olanzapine may help people who have negative symptoms and have not got better on older or other antipsychotics.

### Is olanzapine safe to take?

It is usually safe to take olanzapine regularly as prescribed by your doctor, but it doesn't suit everyone.



Let your doctor know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care may be needed:

- If you have epilepsy, diabetes, Parkinson's disease, glaucoma, or have heart, liver, kidney, thyroid, or prostate problems.
- If you are pregnant, breast feeding or wish to become pregnant.

## **How should I take my olanzapine?**

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Look at the label on your medicine. It should have all the necessary instructions on it. Follow these directions carefully. Always take your tablets with a full glass of water. Never be tempted to change the dose yourself. If you have any questions, speak to your doctor, pharmacist, case manager or nurse.

## **What should I do if I miss a dose?**

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Never change your dose without consulting with your doctor. If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember, if it is within two to three hours of the usual time.

## **What will happen to me when I start taking my olanzapine?**

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Antipsychotics do not work straight away. For example, it may take several days or even weeks for some of the symptoms to reduce. To begin with, most people find that this medication will help them feel more relaxed and calmer. Later, after one or two weeks, other symptoms should begin to improve.

You might get some side effects before you start to feel any better. Most side effects should go away after a few weeks. Look at the table over the page. It tells you what to do if you get any of the usual side effects. Not everyone will get the side effects shown. There are many other possible side effects. Ask your doctor, pharmacist, case manager or nurse if you are worried about anything else that you think might be a side effect.

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

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Always consult with your doctor or pharmacist before starting a new medicine or purchasing medicines over the counter. Olanzapine can react with some other medicines and cause unpleasant side effects. You should avoid sedating antihistamines and cough and cold preparations which contain sedating antihistamines as these can make you sleepy.

## **When I feel better, can I stop taking olanzapine?**

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No. If you stop taking olanzapine your original symptoms may return, but this may not be for three to six months after you stop the medicine.

You and your doctor should decide together when you can come off it. Most people need to be on olanzapine for quite a long time, sometimes years. This is not thought to be harmful. Olanzapine is not addictive.

## What about alcohol and marijuana?

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It is recommended that when you take olanzapine to avoid drinking alcohol, using marijuana and other recreational drugs. These taken with olanzapine can make some people drowsy. They can lessen the effect of olanzapine and add to side effects such as making you clumsy. This can lead to falls or accidents. As well as this, using recreational drugs can make your psychosis worse. Excessive use of any or all of these is especially likely to do this.

Once you are used to your olanzapine you can sometimes drink alcohol in small amounts without any harm. If you want a drink, try a glass of your normal drink and see how you feel. If it doesn't make you feel drowsy and uncoordinated, it is probably okay to drink small amounts. It pays to be cautious because alcohol affects people in different ways, especially when they are taking medication.

It is recognised that many road accidents occur because of mixing alcohol, marijuana or other recreational drugs with these medicines. Don't stop taking olanzapine just because you fancy a joint, a drink or party pill at the weekend.

## What is the metabolic syndrome?

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Antipsychotics can cause something called the metabolic syndrome. This is a combination of weight gain, raised cholesterol and raised blood sugars. Some antipsychotics are more likely to cause the metabolic syndrome than others.

When you start an antipsychotic, your weight, height and waist size will be measured. A heart test called an ECG and a number of blood tests will also be completed. These will be repeated several times during the first year that you are on an antipsychotic to ensure that you remain healthy. It is important when you start an antipsychotic that you eat a healthy diet and that you do some regular exercise.

Talk to your case manager or doctor for advice about this. They may also offer to refer you to a dietitian.

**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.**

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<b>SIDE EFFECTS</b>	<b>WHAT IS IT?</b>	<b>WHAT SHOULD I DO IF THIS HAPPENS TO ME?</b>
<b>Common</b>		
Drowsiness	Feeling sleepy or sluggish. It can last for a few hours after taking your dose.	Avoid tasks you need to be alert for such as driving or using machines. Ask your doctor if you can take your olanzapine at a different time of the day.
Weight gain	Eating more and putting on weight.	Try and avoid putting on weight in the first place. Eat a healthy diet full of vegetables and fibre. Do physical activities such as walking regularly. Avoid fatty foods like chocolate and crisps and high sugar foods such as cakes, sweets and fizzy drinks. Ask to see a dietitian if you need help with food choices.
Constipation	Feeling “bunged up” inside. You can’t pass a bowel motion.	Eat more fibre, e.g. bran and vegetables. Do more walking. Make sure you drink plenty of fluid. A mild laxative from a pharmacy might help.
<b>Fairly Common</b>		
Sexual Dysfunction	Lack of libido. No interest in sex. Inability to maintain an erection or have an orgasm.	Discuss this with your doctor when you next meet.
<b>Uncommon</b>		
Dry Mouth	Your mouth will feel dry and you will not produce much saliva (spit). Dry mouth can cause problems with speech, taste, chewing and swallowing. It can also 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.
Peripheral oedema	When your ankles swell up.	Discuss this with your doctor when you next meet.
Postural hypotension	A low blood pressure. You may feel faint when you stand up.	Try not to stand up too quickly. If you feel dizzy, don’t drive.
<b>Rare</b>		
Agranulocytosis or neutropenia	Low numbers of white cells in the blood. You may get more infections.	This can be picked up from a blood test. Always tell your doctor or carer if you feel ill in any way.
Photosensitivity	Your skin goes blotchy in the sun.	Avoid direct sunlight or sunlamps. Use a high factor sun block cream.