

Alprazolam

Xanax · Xanax XR

Relief for anxiety or panic needs a clear dose plan, a safety plan and regular check-ins.

From Jeffrey Panko, PMHNP-BC's education collection ·

Draft for review · Clinical content has not been revalidated for this website.

TAKE ONLY AS PRESCRIBED

DO NOT STOP REGULAR USE SUDDENLY

Immediate-release and XR tablets work on different schedules. Your prescription sets your dose and timing.

What it is used for

Immediate-release alprazolam is approved for adults with generalized anxiety or panic disorder. XR is approved for adult panic disorder, not generalized anxiety.

It can ease symptoms, but does not replace a longer-term plan such as therapy or another medicine. If prescribed for another reason, ask what benefit to look for.

How it works

It strengthens the effect of GABA, a chemical that quiets nerve signals. This can reduce anxiety, but can also affect alertness, memory and coordination.

XR releases the medicine more slowly. It is not a fast rescue tablet and still carries risks of dependence, misuse and dangerous sedation.

What to expect over time

EARLY RELIEF

Immediate-release can act sooner; response varies by person.

BETWEEN DOSES

Rebound anxiety can resemble returning illness. Tell your team.

REGULAR REVIEW

Track relief, daily function, side effects and how often you use it.

Taking your medication

Follow the exact schedule and maximum on your label. Do not take extra doses for breakthrough symptoms without instructions.

Swallow XR tablets whole; do not split, crush or chew them. XR is generally taken once daily in the morning. Confirm your own directions.

Plan refills before running out. If regular use needs to end, your team will help you reduce it gradually. Do not make a home taper by mixing tablets in water.

When to get help

Call 911: slow or difficult breathing, collapse, inability to wake, or a seizure. Alcohol, opioids and other sedatives make overdose more dangerous.

Get urgent help: severe confusion, hallucinations, intense agitation or withdrawal after missed doses or a sudden reduction. Do not wait for a routine visit.

Contact your team promptly: new suicidal thoughts, unusual aggression, major mood changes, falls or escalating use. Call 911 if there is immediate danger.

Early side effects

Sleepiness, dizziness, fatigue and poor coordination can occur. Do not drive or do hazardous work until you know it is safe for you.

Other effects to discuss

Memory or thinking problems can persist. Report constipation, appetite or sexual changes, and anxiety returning between doses.

What to keep track of

Tell your team how often you take it and whether it helps you function. Mention extra doses, missed doses, falls, memory problems and all other sedating medicines. Dependence is not a moral failing.

Before you start

Share your full medicine list and any history of breathing problems, sleep apnea, liver disease, falls, depression or substance use. Discuss pregnancy plans promptly: exposure late in pregnancy can affect a newborn's breathing or cause withdrawal. Do not suddenly stop regular treatment if pregnancy occurs. US labeling advises against breastfeeding during treatment; ask about alternatives and a safe feeding plan.

Medicines & interactions

Alcohol, opioids & sedatives

Avoid alcohol. Opioids, sleep medicines and other sedatives can dangerously slow breathing. Tell every prescriber; do not stop buprenorphine or methadone yourself. Ask about naloxone if opioids are involved.

Antibiotics & antifungals

Some, including clarithromycin, ketoconazole and itraconazole, can sharply raise alprazolam levels. Have your pharmacist check before starting a new medicine.

Other prescriptions

Ritonavir, some antidepressants and seizure medicines, and digoxin need specific review. Do not guess a dose adjustment or use someone else's instructions.

Nonprescription products

Check sleep aids, sedating allergy medicines, supplements and grapefruit with your pharmacist. A product being sold without a prescription does not make the combination safe.

Everyday tips

Use one clear dose plan and a reminder if needed.

Keep therapy and longer-term treatment appointments.

Discuss symptoms early instead of adding extra doses.

Store securely, never share, and plan refills ahead.

Your questions, answered

What if I miss a dose?

Take it when remembered unless it is almost time for the next dose; then skip it. Never double. If regular doses are interrupted or you develop withdrawal symptoms, contact your team promptly.

Does dependence mean addiction?

No. Your body can adapt even when you take it exactly as prescribed. Addiction involves other patterns such as loss of control and continued use despite harm. Both deserve care, not blame.

How do I stop safely?

Your prescriber will set a gradual, adjustable taper. It may take months or longer after regular use. Slower steps or pauses can help; never suddenly stop or switch medicines yourself.

Can I drive if I feel calmer?

Feeling calmer does not mean your reactions and coordination are normal. Ask about driving and work safety, especially after starting, increasing the dose or adding another medicine.

Storage & safety

Keep it locked away from children, pets and anyone it was not prescribed for. Ask your pharmacist about take-back disposal. For overdose, call Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222; call 911 for trouble breathing, seizures, collapse or inability to wake.

About this information

For general information only; not a substitute for individualized medical advice. This sheet does not cover every risk or interaction. Ask your prescriber or pharmacist before changing how you take this medication.

Sources

1. <https://dailymed.nlm.nih.gov/dailymed/drugInfo.cfm?setid=388e249d-b9b6-44c3-9f8f-880eced0239f>
 2. <https://dailymed.nlm.nih.gov/dailymed/drugInfo.cfm?setid=c8990714-c2f5-4b0c-9f1c-91d77156d962>
 3. <https://www.asam.org/quality-care/clinical-guidelines/benzodiazepine-tapering>
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Educational inclusion does not mean this medication or its indications are treated at this practice. Review the guide for your exact product with your prescriber or pharmacist.

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