

Hydroxyzine

Vistaril • Atarax (former U.S. brand)

An antihistamine used for anxiety or itching. It can work the same day, but sleepiness may outlast the relief.

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

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

FOLLOW YOUR DAILY LIMIT

CHECK HEART-RHYTHM & SEDATING MEDICINES

Use on a schedule or as needed only as prescribed. This adult guide is not a child's dosing plan.

What it is used for

It can ease anxiety, tension and certain allergic itching. Sometimes it is used briefly while another anxiety treatment starts working.

Sleep use is off-label. Ongoing anxiety or insomnia needs a broader plan; feeling sleepy is not the same as getting better.

How it works

It blocks histamine signals, reducing itching and causing a calming, drowsy effect in the brain.

Dry mouth, constipation or foggy thinking can also occur. Related allergy medicine cetirizine is not a replacement for your anxiety prescription.

What to expect over time

15–30 MINUTES

Effects may begin after a dose; individual responses vary.

AROUND 2 HOURS

Effects may be strongest. Do not take another dose early.

LATER / NEXT MORNING

Relief may ease before the medicine clears. Grogginess can linger.

Taking your medication

Follow your own dose, spacing and daily maximum. Do not aim for the highest number listed online; limits differ between products and countries.

Try initial doses when you do not need to drive. Do not drive or use machinery while sleepy, dizzy or mentally slowed, even the following morning.

Food is not required. If prescribed liquid, use a proper measuring device and follow its shake instructions. Do not take extra or combine HCl and pamoate products.

When to get help

Call 911: collapse, a seizure, trouble breathing, severe face/throat swelling or inability to wake. Fainting with a racing or irregular heartbeat can be an emergency.

Stop and seek prompt care: new/worsening rash, especially fever with many small blisters or pus-filled spots. Report palpitations, major confusion or inability to urinate urgently.

Possible overdose? Call Poison Control now, 1-800-222-1222, even without symptoms. Do not make yourself vomit; call 911 for severe symptoms.

Early side effects

Sleepiness, dizziness, dry mouth, headache, constipation or blurred vision can occur. Some people become restless or agitated instead, especially children.

Other effects to discuss

Next-day fogginess, poor balance, bowel/bladder trouble or confusion deserve a review. Feeling less sleepy over time does not make larger doses safe. Report appetite or weight changes too.

What to keep track of

Track doses, symptom relief and daytime function. Heart tracing or blood tests may be needed based on your risks. Tell the allergy-testing team you take hydroxyzine; it can affect results.

Before you start

Tell your team about fainting, an abnormal heart rhythm, slow pulse, heart disease, family sudden death, kidney/liver disease, glaucoma, trouble urinating, seizures, falls or memory problems. Discuss pregnancy or nursing before taking it. It should not be used in early pregnancy; nursing needs an individual plan. Older adults often need a safer alternative.

Medicines & interactions

Alcohol and other sedatives

Avoid alcohol. Opioids, benzodiazepines, sleep medicines and cannabis can add dangerous impairment. Combine only under your clinician's guidance.

Medicines affecting heart rhythm

Some antidepressants, antipsychotics, antibiotics, methadone and ondansetron can raise risk. Ask before combining; a heart tracing does not make every combination safe.

Allergy, PM and drying medicines

Diphenhydramine, bladder medicines and some older antidepressants can add confusion, constipation and urine problems. Check ingredients with your pharmacist.

Any new medicine or supplement

Some drugs raise hydroxyzine levels or lower potassium. Review prescriptions and OTC products, including newly added or stopped medicines.

Everyday tips

Keep using therapy and your agreed longer-term anxiety plan.

Ask about CBT-I if insomnia persists.

Use sugar-free gum, dental care, fluids and fiber if appropriate.

Tell your team if you need it more often or feel too foggy.

Your questions, answered

What if I miss a dose?

As-needed use has no dose to catch up. On a regular schedule, take it when remembered unless the next dose is near; then skip it. Never double up.

Will it change who I am?

That is not the goal. You should be able to function, not feel heavily dulled. Report fogginess, confusion or feeling unlike yourself rather than accepting it as necessary.

Is it addictive like a benzodiazepine?

It is not controlled and does not have the same established dependence pattern. That does not mean zero risk: sedation can change with repeated use, and taking too much is dangerous.

Do I need to taper?

Occasional use usually needs no taper. Discuss stopping regular or high-dose use with your team; anxiety or sleep trouble may return. Do not stop another sedative suddenly because you take hydroxyzine.

Storage & safety

Keep tightly closed at the temperature on your label, away from heat, moisture and light, and locked away from children and pets. Do not share it. Ask your pharmacist about take-back disposal.

A final reminder

Follow your own prescribed plan.

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://labeling.pfizer.com/ShowLabeling.aspx?id=672>
 2. <https://medlineplus.gov/druginfo/meds/a682866.html>
 3. <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/hydroxyzine-vistaril-atarax/>
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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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