

Oxazepam

Serax (former US brand)

Relief should make daily life easier, not leave you too sleepy to manage it. Keep a clear dose and review plan.

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

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

USE ONLY YOUR PRESCRIBED DOSE

DO NOT STOP REGULAR USE SUDDENLY

Your anxiety schedule and an alcohol-withdrawal treatment plan are not interchangeable.

What it is used for

Oxazepam treats anxiety symptoms, including anxiety that occurs with depression. It does not treat depression itself.

It can also help with alcohol-withdrawal symptoms under a care plan. Severe withdrawal is not something to manage alone at home.

How it works

It strengthens GABA, a calming brain signal. This can reduce anxiety but also slow thinking, memory, balance and breathing.

Your body can adapt with regular use. That is why stopping suddenly or reducing too quickly can cause serious withdrawal, even when taken as prescribed.

What to expect over time

FIRST DOSES

Watch for sleepiness, dizziness and poor balance.

EARLY REVIEW

Discuss relief, alertness and your actual dose use.

EACH RENEWAL

Review whether it is still needed and how to stop.

Taking your medication

Take only as directed, with or without food. Some schedules use three or four doses daily; your own prescription controls. Do not add doses because relief feels slow.

If it is prescribed as needed, follow the dose and daily limits. If it is for alcohol withdrawal, follow that specific plan and attend every check-in.

Do not stop regular use suddenly. Call before running out and ask for a written taper. Do not open capsules into homemade mixtures or skip days to taper yourself.

When to get help

Call 911: slow/stopped breathing, inability to wake, collapse, a seizure, or severe swelling with breathing trouble.

Get urgent help: severe confusion, hallucinations, dangerous agitation or suicidal thoughts. Use emergency services for immediate danger.

Call your team promptly: falls, memory gaps, worsening sedation, yellow skin/eyes or unusual infections. During alcohol withdrawal, worsening symptoms need urgent reassessment.

Early side effects

Drowsiness, dizziness, headache, weakness, stomach upset and poor coordination can occur. Some people feel restless rather than calm.

Other effects to discuss

Memory and balance problems may remain even when you feel less sleepy. Do not drive or use dangerous machinery until your team says it is safe; never do so while impaired.

What to keep track of

Track relief, alertness, balance, memory and dose use. Report extra doses or new sedatives. Longer-term treatment may need periodic blood counts and liver tests. Alcohol withdrawal needs closer, often daily, follow-up—not just a refill.

Before you start

Discuss falls, breathing problems or sleep apnea, low blood pressure, glaucoma, liver/kidney disease, depression, substance use and previous withdrawal. Tell your team about pregnancy or nursing. Late pregnancy exposure can affect the newborn; do not stop suddenly on your own. Breastfeeding may be considered with an individualized plan and monitoring for a sleepy, poorly feeding or slowly breathing infant. Avoid bed-sharing while sedated.

Medicines & interactions

Alcohol

Avoid drinking while taking oxazepam. Treatment for alcohol withdrawal needs a supervised plan; it does not make combining the medicine with alcohol safe.

Opioids

Pain medicines or other opioids can dangerously slow breathing. Ask about naloxone if opioids are involved. It does not reverse oxazepam. Do not stop methadone or buprenorphine on your own.

Other sedating products

Sleep aids, muscle relaxants, gabapentin/pregabalin and sedating allergy/cold remedies can add impairment. Check OTC labels and ask before combining them.

Cannabis, CBD & changes

These may add sedation or interactions. Check before starting or stopping medicines or supplements. Fewer liver-enzyme interactions does not mean no interactions.

Everyday tips

Pair short-term relief with treatment for the underlying anxiety.

Keep a dose record and arrange safe transportation.

Use a clear path and good lighting if you get up at night.

Plan reviews and refills before your supply runs out.

Your questions, answered

What if I miss a dose?

For scheduled use, take it when remembered unless it is almost time for the next dose; then skip it. Never double. For as-needed use, there is no dose to make up. Follow any specific withdrawal-treatment instructions.

Can it change how I feel or think?

Yes. Report fogginess, memory gaps, irritability or worsening mood. Do not assume these are simply your personality or that every side effect will disappear with time.

Is dependence the same as addiction?

No. Physical dependence means the body has adapted and may need a gradual taper. Addiction involves a different pattern, such as loss of control or use despite harm. Both deserve care without blame.

Can I stop once I feel better?

Not suddenly after regular use. Withdrawal can include shaking, severe anxiety, confusion or seizures. A gradual plan may take months or longer and should change with your symptoms. Ask for practical dose instructions.

Storage & safety

Keep capsules in the original closed container at room temperature, away from heat and moisture. Store securely away from children, pets and others; never share. Use medicine take-back. For overdose call Poison Control, 1-800-222-1222; call 911 for severe symptoms.

A final reminder

Your prescribed plan takes priority.

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/fda/fdaDrugXsl.cfm?setid=67f821fa-5663-4d69-82c9-5ee13a09f324>
 2. <https://medlineplus.gov/druginfo/meds/a682050.html>
 3. <https://sps.nhs.uk/articles/using-benzodiazepines-during-breastfeeding/>
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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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