

Medication Information for Parents and Teachers

Prazosin—Minipress

General Information About Medication

Each child and adolescent is different. No one has exactly the same combination of medical and psychological problems. It is a good idea to talk with the doctor or nurse about the reasons a medicine is being used. It is very important to keep all appointments and to be in touch by telephone if you have concerns. It is important to communicate with the doctor, nurse, or therapist. An *advanced practice nurse* (APN) has additional education and training after becoming a registered nurse (RN). Your child's medication may be prescribed by a medical doctor (MD or DO) or an APN. In addition, a *physician assistant* (PA) working with a physician may prescribe certain medications. In this information sheet, "doctor" includes medical doctors as well as APNs and PAs who prescribe medication. Often a nurse (RN) will be part of the team and answer questions and give information.

It is very important that the medicine be taken exactly as the doctor instructs. However, once in a while, everyone forgets to give a medicine on time. It is a good idea to ask the doctor or nurse what to do if this happens. Do not stop or change a medicine without asking the doctor or nurse first.

If the medicine seems to stop working, it may be because it is not being taken regularly. The youth may be "cheeking" or hiding the medicine or forgetting to take it (especially at school). The doses may be too far apart or a different dose or medicine may be needed. Something at school, at home, or in the neighborhood may be upsetting the youth, or he or she may need special help for learning disabilities or tutoring. Please discuss your concerns with the doctor. **Do not just increase the dose.** It is also very important not to decrease the dose or stop the medicine without talking to the doctor first. The problem being treated may come back, or there could be uncomfortable or even dangerous results.

All medicines should be kept in a safe place, out of the reach of children, and should be supervised by an adult. If someone takes too much of a medicine, call the doctor, the poison control center, or a hospital emergency room.

Each medicine has a "generic" or chemical name. Just like laundry detergents or paper towels, some medicines are sold by more than one company under different brand names. The same medicine may be available under a generic name and several brand names. The generic medications are usually less expensive than the brand name ones. The generic medications have the same chemical formula, but they may or may not be exactly the same strength as the brand-name medications. Also, some brands of pills contain dye or other things that can cause allergic reactions. It is a good idea to talk to the doctor and the pharmacist about whether it is important to use a specific brand of medicine.

Any medicine can cause an allergic reaction. Examples are hives, itching, rashes, swelling, and trouble breathing. Even a tiny amount of a medicine can cause a reaction in patients who are allergic to that medicine. Be *sure* to talk to the doctor before restarting a medicine that has caused an allergic reaction and tell the doctor about any reactions to medicine that your child has had before.

Taking more than one medicine at the same time may cause more side effects or cause one of the medicines to not work as well. Always ask the doctor, nurse, or pharmacist before adding another

medicine, either prescription or bought without a prescription in a store or on the Internet. Be sure that each doctor knows about *all* of the medicines your child is taking. Also tell the doctor about any vitamins, herbal medicines, or supplements your child may be taking. Some of these may have side effects alone or when taken with this medication. It is a very good idea to keep a list with you of the names and doses of all medicines that your child is taking.

Everyone taking medicine should have a physical examination at least once a year.

If you think that your child may be using drugs or alcohol, please tell the doctor right away.

Pregnancy requires special care in the use of medicine. Some medicines can cause birth defects if taken by a pregnant mother. **Please tell the doctor immediately if you suspect the teenager is at risk of becoming pregnant.** The doctor may wish to discuss sexual behavior and/or birth control with your daughter.

Printed information like this applies to children and adolescents in general. If you have questions about the medicine, or if you notice changes or anything unusual, please ask the doctor or nurse. As scientific research advances, knowledge increases and advice changes. Even experts do not always agree. Many medicines have not been “approved” by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in children or use for particular problems. For this reason, use of the medicine for a problem or age group often is not listed in the *Physicians’ Desk Reference*. This does not necessarily mean that the medicine is dangerous or does not work, only that the company that makes the medicine has not received permission to advertise the medicine for use in children. Companies often do not apply for this permission because it is expensive to do the tests needed to apply for approval for use in children. Once a medication is approved by the FDA for any purpose, a doctor is allowed to prescribe it according to research and clinical experience.

Note to Teachers

It is a good idea to talk with the parent(s) about the reason(s) that a medication is being used. If the parent(s) sign consent to release information, it is often helpful for you to talk with the doctor. If the parent(s) give permission, the doctor may ask you to fill out rating forms about your experience with the student’s behavior, feelings, academic performance, and medication side effects. This information is very useful in selecting and monitoring medication treatment. If you have observations that you think are important, do not hesitate to share these with the student’s parent(s) and treating clinicians (with parental consent).

It is very important that the medicine be taken exactly as the doctor instructs. However, everyone forgets to give a medicine on time once in a while. It is a good idea to ask the parent(s) in advance what to do if this happens. Do not stop or change the time you are giving a medicine at school without parental permission. If a medication is to be taken with food, but lunchtime or snack time changes, be sure to notify the parent(s) so appropriate adjustments can be made.

All medicines should be kept in a secure place and should be supervised by an adult. If someone takes too much of a medicine, follow your school procedure for an urgent medical problem.

Taking medicine is a private matter and is best managed discreetly and confidentially. It is important to be sensitive to the student’s feelings about taking medicine.

If you suspect that the student is using drugs or alcohol, please tell the parent(s) or a school counselor right away.

Please tell the parent(s) or school nurse if you suspect medication side effects.

Modifications of the classroom environment or assignments may be useful in addition to medication. The student may need to be evaluated for additional help or a 504 plan or an Individualized Education Plan for learning problems or emotional or behavioral issues.

Any expression of suicidal thoughts or feelings or self-harm by a child or adolescent is a signal of distress and should be taken seriously. These behaviors should not be dismissed as “attention seeking.” School procedures for safety issues should be followed.

What Is Prazosin (Minipress)?

Prazosin was first used to treat high blood pressure, so it is sometimes called an *antihypertensive*. It is also called an *alpha 1 blocker*. It may be used to treat urinary problems associated with prostate enlargement and stiffness associated with Raynaud's disease. A newer use for prazosin is the treatment of sleep-related and other problems in people with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It comes as brand name Minipress and generic tablets.

How Can This Medicine Help?

Prazosin may help with falling asleep and staying asleep in people with PTSD, who have experienced very frightening events. It can help decrease intrusive thoughts, lessen hyperarousal, and decrease nightmares.

The positive effects of prazosin may be observed right away, but sometimes your child may need to take prazosin for a longer period of time before the full benefit of the medication is seen. Sometimes the dose needs to be increased to see a benefit. Once the medicine is at the right dose, it may take up to 2 weeks before the doctor is able to decide whether the medicine is working.

How Does This Medicine Work?

Prazosin works by decreasing the level of excitement in parts of the brain. It blocks the action of certain nerve impulses. It affects the levels of *norepinephrine*, one of the *neurotransmitters*—a chemical that the brain makes for nerve cells to communicate with each other. Norepinephrine is released by the body during times of stress and/or anxiety. It is believed that blocking the effects of norepinephrine in the brain can help decrease symptoms such as nightmares and sleep problems in people who have PTSD. Prazosin is chemically different from sedatives or tranquilizers, even though it may make your child sleepy when he or she first starts taking it.

How Long Does This Medicine Last?

Prazosin is usually started before bedtime. It reaches its highest levels in the body between 1 and 3 hours after it is taken and is broken down in the body after that time. Sometimes an additional morning dose is needed.

How Will the Doctor Monitor This Medicine?

The doctor will review your child's medical history and physical examination before starting prazosin. The doctor may order some blood or urine tests to be sure your child does not have a hidden medical condition that would make it unsafe to use this medicine. Be sure to tell the doctor if your child or anyone in the family has high blood pressure, heart disease, or diabetes. The doctor or nurse may measure your child's pulse and blood pressure before starting prazosin. The doctor may also want to obtain an electrocardiogram (ECG or heart rhythm test) before starting the medicine.

After the medicine is started, the doctor will want to have regular appointments with you and your child to see how the medicine is working, to see if a dose change is needed, and to watch for side effects. The doctor

will also want to evaluate whether prazosin is still needed and to see if any other treatment is needed. The doctor or nurse will check your child's height, weight, pulse, and blood pressure.

What Side Effects Can This Medicine Have?

Any medicine can have side effects, including an allergy to the medicine. Because each patient is different, the doctor will monitor the youth closely, especially when the medicine is started. The doctor will work with you to increase the positive effects and decrease the negative effects of the medicine. Please tell the doctor if any of the listed side effects appear or if you think that the medicine is causing any other problems. Not all of the rare or unusual side effects are listed.

Side effects are most common after starting the medicine or after a dose increase. Many side effects can be avoided or lessened by starting with a very low dose and increasing it slowly—ask the doctor.

Allergic Reaction

Tell the doctor in a day or two (if possible, before the next dose of medicine):

- Hives
- Itching
- Rash

Stop the medicine and get *immediate* medical care:

- Trouble breathing or chest tightness
- Swelling of lips, tongue, or throat

Common, but Usually Mild, Side Effects

The following side effects are more common at first or as the dose is increased. If they do not go away after a week or two, contact the doctor:

- Dizziness or light-headedness—This side effect is generally worse when the child stands up quickly, especially when getting out of bed in the morning. Try having the child stand up slowly.
- Daytime sleepiness—Usually worse in the first 2–4 weeks. Do not allow your child to drive a car, ride a bicycle or motorcycle, or operate machinery if this happens.
- Fatigue or tiredness
- Low blood pressure—Rarely a serious problem as this medication only weakly affects blood pressure
- Headache
- Stomachache, nausea
- Slow pulse rate (heartbeat)

Less Common Side Effects

Tell the doctor within a day or two:

- Nasal congestion
- Dry mouth

- Increased blood sugar (mainly in persons with diabetes)
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Mood changes such as depression or irritability
- Bed-wetting or frequent urination
- Vivid and intense dreams right before falling asleep or waking up
- Confusion
- Blurred vision
- Muscle cramping
- Hair loss

Less Common, but Serious, Side Effects

Call the doctor *immediately*:

- Severe or increased dizziness or light-headedness
- Fainting

Very Rare, but Serious, Side Effects

Call the doctor *immediately* or go to the emergency room:

- Irregular heartbeat
- Trouble breathing
- Decreased frequency of urination; rapid, puffy swelling of the body (especially legs and feet); sudden headache with nausea and vomiting—These could be signs of kidney failure.
- Erection of the penis lasting more than 1 hour—This may be painful and could cause permanent damage.

Some Interactions With Other Medicines or Food

Please note that the following are only the most likely interactions with other medicines or food.

Talk to your doctor about any other medications your child may be taking that also affect blood pressure before starting this medication.

Because this medication is cleared from the body through the liver, the dose of prazosin may need to be adjusted in children with liver disease.

Increased sleepiness can occur in combination with medications used for anxiety (sedatives or tranquilizers), sleep (hypnotics), allergy or colds (antihistamines), or psychosis or seizures (anticonvulsants).

Prazosin can be taken with or without food.

What Could Happen if This Medicine Is Stopped Suddenly?

Do not stop this medication suddenly without talking to your doctor. Some problems may worsen if the medication is stopped suddenly, including

- Increase in blood pressure and/or heartbeat
- Worsening of nightmares
- Trouble sleeping
- Nervousness or anxiety

Because of these effects, it is important not to stop prazosin suddenly. Prazosin should be decreased slowly (tapered) as directed by the doctor. It is also important to avoid missing a dose of prazosin because withdrawal symptoms such as heart or blood pressure problems can occur. **Be sure not to let the prescription run out!**

How Long Will This Medicine Be Needed?

There is no way to know how long your child will need to take prazosin. The length of time will largely depend on how well the medicine works for him or her, whether there are side effects, and what condition is being treated. Sometimes medicine is needed for a short time to treat a particular problem. Occasionally a person may require treatment lasting for several months or may need to start the medicine again if symptoms return.

What Else Should I Know About This Medicine?

If your child is sleepy from prazosin, do not allow him or her to drive or operate machinery until you are sure that he or she can perform these tasks safely.

Prazosin may be confused with prednisone. Be sure to check the medicine when you get it from the pharmacy.

Notes

Use this space to take notes or to write down questions you want to ask the doctor.

Copyright © 2015 American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc. The purchaser of this book is licensed to distribute copies of this form in limited numbers for personal practice use. Permission must be requested for commercial use and any electronic use. The authors have worked to ensure that all information in this book concerning drug dosages, schedules, routes of administration, and side effects is accurate as of the time of publication and consistent with standards set by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the general medical community and accepted child psychiatric practice. The information on this medication sheet does not cover all the possible uses, precautions, side effects, or interactions of this drug. For a complete listing of side effects, see the manufacturer’s package insert, which can be obtained from your physician or pharmacist. As medical research and practice advance, therapeutic standards may change. For this reason and because human and mechanical errors sometimes occur, we recommend that readers follow the advice of a physician who is directly involved in their care or the care of a member of their family.

From Dulcan MK, Ballard R (editors): *Helping Parents and Teachers Understand Medications for Behavioral and Emotional Problems: A Resource Book of Medication Information Handouts*, Fourth Edition. Washington, DC, American Psychiatric Publishing, 2015