

Xanax (alprazolam)

Brand and Generic Names:

Brand Name = Xanax®, Xanax XR®, Niravam®, Alprazolam Intensol®

- Tablets: 0.25 mg, 0.5 mg, 1 mg, 2 mg
- Extended release tablets: 0.5 mg, 1 mg, 2 mg, 3 mg
- Orally disintegrating tablets: 0.25 mg, 0.5 mg, 1 mg, 2 mg
- Oral solution (concentrate): 1 mg/ml

Generic name = alprazolam

What is Xanax® and what does it treat?

Alprazolam is an antianxiety agent that belongs to the class of medications called benzodiazepines (ben-zoe-dye-AZE-eh-peens). Similar medications include Valium® (diazepam), Ativan® (lorazepam), and Klonopin® (clonazepam). Alprazolam is approved to treat panic disorder (with or without agoraphobia), certain types of anxiety disorders (such as generalized anxiety disorder), and for short-term relief of anxiety symptoms.

Panic disorder is associated with recurrent, unexpected panic attacks, that often involve a short period of intense fear or discomfort, along with other physical symptoms such as palpitations, sweating, shaking, shortness of breath, chest pain, nausea, dizziness, and fear of dying.

Generalized anxiety disorder is associated with unrealistic, excessive anxiety or worry about two or more life circumstances for a period of 6 months or longer. Some of the symptoms which may be present include: muscle tension, aches or soreness, feeling shaky, restlessness, palpitations or increased heart rate, sweating, shortness of breath, dry mouth, dizziness, diarrhea, nausea, frequent urination, irritability, and/or trouble falling or staying asleep.

What is the most important information I should know about Xanax®?

1. Take your medication exactly as prescribed by your healthcare provider to avoid relapse of the symptoms for which you are taking alprazolam.
2. Panic disorder and other anxiety disorders usually require long-term treatment. Only your healthcare provider can determine the length of alprazolam treatment that is right for you.
3. Do not stop taking alprazolam or change your dose without talking to your healthcare provider first.
4. Stopping alprazolam abruptly can result in one or more of the following withdrawal effects: insomnia, irritability, fatigue, vomiting, diarrhea, sweating, restlessness, light-headedness, abdominal and muscle cramps, tremors, behavioral disturbances, and seizures. This is why it is important to gradually decrease the dose of alprazolam, rather than abruptly stop.
5. Alprazolam treatment must be monitored by a healthcare provider. Be sure to keep all of your scheduled appointments while on alprazolam.
6. You should not take illegal drugs or drink alcohol while taking alprazolam.

Are there specific concerns about Xanax® and Pregnancy?

If you are taking alprazolam and would like to become pregnant, discuss your plans with your healthcare provider to weigh the risk versus benefits of the decision. The risks and benefits of the illness, medications, and the risks to the fetus may interact. This is a complex decision as untreated panic disorder, or other psychiatric or medical disorders, may also have risk to the mother and fetus.

Several studies have indicated there is an increased risk of congenital malformations when alprazolam is taken during pregnancy. If alprazolam is used during pregnancy, or if you become pregnant while taking alprazolam, you should ask your healthcare provider about the potential hazards to the fetus.

Children that are born to mothers taking alprazolam may experience withdrawal symptoms shortly after birth. These symptoms may include: decreased muscle tone, breathing and feeding difficulties, and decreased body temperature.

Alprazolam passes into breast milk during breast feeding, and it is not recommended for mothers taking alprazolam to breast feed their infants.

What should I discuss with my healthcare provider before taking Xanax®?

1. Symptoms that are most bothersome to you about your condition
2. If you have thoughts of suicide
3. The medications you have taken in the past for treatment of panic disorder, anxiety disorders, or other conditions being treated with alprazolam.

4. Any medical problems you have.
5. All other medications you are currently taking (including herbals and dietary supplements) and any medication allergies you have
6. If you are pregnant, plan to become pregnant, or are breast-feeding
7. Any medication side effects you may have experienced in the past or are currently experiencing
8. If you drink alcohol or use illegal drugs

How should I take Xanax®?

1. Alprazolam may be taken once, twice, three, or four times daily, depending on why you are taking the medication and the type of tablet or solution you are taking. It may be taken with or without food. The disintegrating tablets may be taken without water, as they dissolve quickly in the mouth. Your healthcare provider will determine the dose that is right for you based upon your response.
2. Xanax XR® tablets should be swallowed whole, and should not be chewed, crushed, and broken.
3. Use a pillbox or calendar to help you remember to take your medication.

What happens if I miss a dose of Xanax®?

If you miss a dose of alprazolam, take it as soon as you remember, but only if it is not closer to when your next dose is due. If it is close to your next dose, wait until then to take the medication and skip the missed dose. Do not double your next dose or take more than your prescribed dose. Discussing this scenario with your healthcare provider ahead of time is advised.

What should I avoid while taking Xanax®?

1. Use caution while driving. In some patients, alprazolam may cause dizziness, drowsiness, and slowed reaction time. Make sure you know how you react to this medication before you drive, operate machinery, or do other activities that may be dangerous if you are not alert.
2. Avoid drinking alcohol or using illegal drugs as this may increase sedation, toxicity and the risk of overdose.
3. Avoid skipping or missing doses of this medication. Alprazolam is usually taken on a daily basis in order to best help with your symptoms.

What happens if I overdose with Xanax®?

If an overdose occurs, whether intentional or accidental, immediate medical attention is necessary. Call your doctor or emergency medical service (911). You may also contact the poison control center (1-800-222-1222).

Symptoms of overdose include confusion, impaired coordination, slow reflexes, dizziness and possibly falling. In severe cases, coma and death have occurred. Alcohol significantly increases the toxicity of benzodiazepine overdose.

What are the possible side effects of Xanax®?

Common side effects of alprazolam include drowsiness, dizziness, depression, fatigue, memory problems, nervousness, impaired coordination, and decreased ability to concentrate. These side effects will often decrease or go away after the first few weeks as your body adjusts to the medication.

Talk with your healthcare provider if you experience any side effects that are bothersome to you.

Are there any risks for taking Xanax® for long periods of time?

Alprazolam is a Schedule IV controlled substance, similar to other benzodiazepine medications, such as Librium®, Ativan®, Valium®, and Klonopin®. There is a risk of physical and psychological dependence when it is taken for long periods of time. Sudden discontinuation of alprazolam may result in withdrawal symptoms, such as insomnia, light-headedness, irritability, vomiting, sweating, restlessness, abdominal and muscle cramps, tremors, behavioral disturbances, and seizures.

What other medications may interact with Xanax®?

Some medications, such as ketoconazole, itraconazole, nefazodone, fluoxetine, fluvoxamine, cimetidine, and erythromycin may increase the blood levels of alprazolam.

Some medications, such as carbamazepine, may decrease the blood levels of alprazolam.

Other medications or substances that may cause drowsiness may interact with alprazolam to cause excessive drowsiness, or dizziness. These could include: alcohol, antihistamines (such as diphenhydramine), narcotic pain medication (such as morphine, oxycodone, and hydrocodone), barbiturates (such as phenobarbital), sleeping medications (such as zolpidem), antianxiety medications, antipsychotic medications, certain anticonvulsant medications, and tricyclic antidepressant medications (such as amitriptyline).

How long does it take for Xanax® to work?

The onset of action usually occurs within 20 to 60 minutes. Although you may experience beneficial effects from alprazolam within a few days of starting to take the medication, it often takes several weeks to get the full effect of the medication. Your healthcare provider may also need to gradually adjust the dose over a period of several weeks to find the dose that works best for you.

Written by: Keith D. Anderson, Pharm.D., BCPP

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NAMI wishes to thank the College of Psychiatric and Neurological Pharmacists for producing this fact sheet.

Reviewed by Dr. Ken Duckworth, NAMI Medical Director

For further information. Please contact the pharmaceutical company listed below.

Pfizer	235 East 42nd Street NY, NY 10017	1-212-733-2323	www.bms.com
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Free or low-cost medications provided by pharmaceutical companies

Some pharmaceutical companies offer medication assistance programs to low-income individuals and families. These programs typically require a doctor's consent and proof of financial status. They may also require that you have either no health insurance, or no prescription drug benefit through your health insurance. Please contact the pharmaceutical company directly for specific eligibility requirements and application information.

Xanax Rx Assistance Program: 1-866-776-3700