

# Diazepam

(pronounced dye - az - ee - pam)

## Why has diazepam been prescribed?

Diazepam is known as an anxiolytic and also a hypnotic drug (sleeping tablet). These medications are prescribed to treat anxiety, insomnia and a variety of other conditions.

## What are the benefits of taking diazepam?

Diazepam may be helpful in relieving anxiety, relaxing muscles and tension and helping people who have difficulty getting to sleep.

## Are there any precautions with diazepam?

Diazepam is suitable for most people. As with all medicines, however, there are precautions. Your prescriber will usually check that it is safe to prescribe diazepam, but let your prescriber know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care may be needed:

- a) if you have myasthenia gravis, sleep apnoea syndrome, porphyria, severe lung disease, respiratory failure, severe kidney or liver trouble.
- b) if you are taking any other medication, especially omeprazole, HIV medications, sedative antihistamines, antibiotics such as rifampicin, erythromycin, antifungals, oral contraceptives, medication for Parkinson's disease, medication for schizophrenia, medication for anxiety or insomnia, antidepressants, anticonvulsants or strong pain killers. Also, tell your prescriber if you buy any medicine 'over the counter' from a pharmacy or supermarket. Please also tell your prescriber if you take any alternative or complementary medicine such as Chinese herbal medicines. St John's Wort should not be taken by patients prescribed diazepam.
- c) if you are pregnant, breast feeding, or wish to become pregnant.
- d) If you have lactose intolerance as the tablets contain lactose. The liquid does not contain lactose so can be used.

## What is the usual dose of diazepam?

For anxiety the usual dose is 2-5mg three times daily. For insomnia the dose maybe between 5-15mg a day. This maybe lower in older people.

## How should diazepam be taken?

Diazepam can be taken three times during the day for anxiety or, for insomnia, once a day, at night. However, you and your prescriber may decide that it is better for you to take the medicine at another time.

## What form does diazepam come in?

Diazepam is available as tablets and liquid. The tablets are available as 2mg, 5mg and 10mg. The solution is available as 2mg per 5ml or strong solution as 5mg per 5ml. Diazepam is also available in the form of injection, rectal tubes and suppositories which are used for different conditions.

## What should be done if a dose is missed?

**Anxiety:** If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If you miss a whole day's dose – just carry on as normal with the next day's dose.

**Insomnia:** Ideally diazepam should not be taken regularly. It is recommended that it should only be taken every second or third night or when absolutely necessary.

## What will happen when diazepam is first taken?

Diazepam should start to work quite quickly, usually within 30 to 60 minutes. Many people do not experience any side effects. However some people may experience some side effects. We have listed potential side effects in the table below, whether or not they are likely to be short or long-term and what measures can be taken is also described. There are other possible side effects – we have listed only the most important ones. Ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if you are worried about anything else that you think might be a side effect. Further information on side effects is available in the official manufacturer's leaflet.

## Reporting side effects

The 'Yellow Card' scheme encourages patients to report any side effects that they feel may be caused by their medication. Ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse for the forms if you wish to report any side effects. Alternatively, telephone 0800 100 3352 or go to [www.mhra.gov.uk](http://www.mhra.gov.uk).

## Is diazepam addictive?

Diazepam may be addictive if it is taken continually for extended periods or at high doses. There may also be a risk that tolerance may develop. Tolerance means that higher doses are needed to achieve the same effect. If you stop taking the medicine suddenly, you may experience unpleasant physical feelings. Symptoms usually only occur after extended use and can include return of insomnia, anxiety, sweating, headache, palpitations and panic attacks. Reducing the dose of diazepam slowly may make

these symptoms less severe.

#### What about alcohol?

It is recommended that people taking diazepam should not drink alcohol. This is because both diazepam and alcohol can cause drowsiness. If the two are taken together, severe drowsiness can result. This can lead to falls and accidents. As well as this, drinking alcohol may make anxiety and sleep problems worse. Never drink alcohol and drive. Discuss any concerns you have with your doctor, pharmacist or nurse.

#### Is it OK to stop taking diazepam when symptoms go away?

Yes. Diazepam should be taken only for short periods - ideally for less than four weeks. Other methods of dealing with anxiety and insomnia may also be tried. These include relaxation techniques and psychological therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy. You should always discuss with your prescriber any plans you have to reduce or stop any of your prescribed medicines.

#### Are there any alternatives to diazepam?

Yes, there are alternatives available. Although anxiolytic and hypnotic drugs have broadly similar therapeutic effects they differ in the side effects they produce. There are other treatments for anxiety and insomnia available so most people can find one which suits them. Psychological and practical therapies can also help in some people with anxiety and insomnia, either as an alternative to medication or alongside it.

### Summary of side effects

Side effect	Side effect
<p><b>Drowsiness - Common</b> (the morning after)</p> <p><b>What can be done about it?</b> Do not drive if you are drowsy or dizzy the next day. Try to allow 7 to 8 hours for uninterrupted sleep after taking.</p>	
(Other less common) side effects	How common is it and what can be done about it?
Confusion	<b>Uncommon</b> Tell your prescriber if you experience confusion.
Muscle weakness	<b>Uncommon</b> Tell your prescriber if you experience muscle weakness.
Amnesia (memory loss)	<b>Uncommon</b> Tell your prescriber if taking diazepam causes any memory loss.
Incoordination	<b>Uncommon</b> Tell your prescriber if you experience difficulty coordinating movements.
Dizziness	<b>Rare</b> This may wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.
Headache	<b>Rare</b> This should wear off within a few days. Paracetamol can be taken but discuss with your prescriber if this persists.
Dry mouth	<b>Rare</b> This should wear off within a few days. Sugar-free boiled sweets, chewing gum or eating citrus fruits may help. Discuss with the prescriber if this persists.
Disinhibition (loss of self control and inhibitions)	<b>Rare</b> Tell your prescriber if your behaviour changes in any way.
Depressed mood	<b>Rare</b> Tell your prescriber if taking diazepam causes any changes in mood, perception, or thinking ability.
Irritability	
Aggression	
Nightmares	<b>Very rare</b> Tell your prescriber if taking diazepam causes any changes in mood, perception, or thinking ability.
Hallucinations	
Rash	<b>Very rare</b> Tell the prescriber straightaway if any rash develops.
Blood disorders	<b>Very rare</b> Any sore throat, fever, bruising or nose bleeds should be reported to your prescriber

	immediately
Jaundice	<b>Very rare</b> If you notice any yellowing of the skin or eyes contact your prescriber straightaway.

*Very common* = almost everyone affected      *Common* = many people affected      *Uncommon* = some people affected  
*Rare* = few people affected      *Very rare* = very few or no one affected

### Disclaimer

*This leaflet is to help you understand more about your medication. This is not an official manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet (see <http://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/>). Remember, leaflets like this can only describe some of the effects of medication. You may also find other books or leaflets useful. If you have access to the internet you may find a lot of information there as well, but be careful, as internet based information is not always accurate. If in doubt consult your GP or a health care professional.*

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