

# Brexpiprazole

Brexpiprazole (rexulti) can help depression, anxiety, agitation, paranoia and hallucinations. It belongs to a class of medications called the atypical antipsychotics, which differ widely in their side effects and benefits. Brexpiprazole was studied in many people with non-bipolar depression (also called unipolar depression) and found to make antidepressants work better in that condition.

Brexpiprazole also treats schizophrenia (a disorder that causes paranoid thinking or hallucinations). Brexpiprazole has not been fully studied in bipolar mania or bipolar depression but is similar to other drugs which treat those conditions.

Brexpiprazole can take up to 2-3 weeks to work fully but can bring benefits after a few days.

## How should I take it?

It can be taken all at once or divided twice per day (either method will work; you should choose which is most convenient or best tolerated for you). Brexpiprazole's benefits build up gradually in the brain and are not impacted by the time of day you take it. If it makes you feel groggy you should take it at night.

It's a good idea to link the time you take brexpiprazole with a daily routine that you already have in place. Think of things you never go a day without, such as brushing your teeth, showering or a morning cup of coffee. Store your medication close to that routine and take it at the same time so you can build on habits you've already developed.

## What if I forget a dose?

Take the missed dose as soon as you remember it. However, if it is almost time for the next

dose, skip the missed dose and continue your regular dosing schedule. Do not take a double dose to make up for a missed one.

## Key Points

1. Brexpiprazole can be taken day or night.
2. Coupons are available at [www.rexulti.com](http://www.rexulti.com).
3. There are several rare, but serious, side effects with this medication (diabetes, high cholesterol, tardive dyskinesia).
4. Insurance authorization may be required (contact us at [auth@moodtreatmentcenter.com](mailto:auth@moodtreatmentcenter.com) if so)

## How long do I need to take it?

This depends on your diagnosis and which other medications you are taking. Most people with bipolar disorder need to stay on at least one mood stabilizer for the long term in order to prevent mood swings. If brexpiprazole helped, it is best to stay on it for at least 6 months before considering going off it. That gives the brain time to build up habits of stability.

## What happens if I stop it?

Brexpiprazole is not addictive and does not cause withdrawal symptoms. If you plan to come off brexpiprazole, it is best to do so slowly (over at least 2 weeks) as that will lower the chance of sudden mood swings returning.

## Checking labs

It is a good idea to check for diabetes and high cholesterol while taking brexpiprazole. This medication, as well as bipolar disorder itself, increases the risk of these conditions.

## Side effects

Brexpiprazole is generally well tolerated. Weight gain and tiredness are rare. The most common side effects are nausea and an uncomfortable restless feeling called *akathisia*.

If you don't tolerate the medication, try cutting your dose in half until the side effects get better and then raising it up.

*These side effects tend to improve with time or by lowering the dose:*

Nausea, tiredness, restlessness, muscle aches or stiffness.

As you are starting the medicine, use caution when driving or performing tasks that require alertness. This should not be a problem once you have adjusted to the medicine and know how it affects you.

### **Rare side effects**

*Low blood pressure:* brexpiprazole can cause blood pressure to drop when you stand up (leading to dizziness or falls). You can reduce this risk by standing up slowly.

*Elevations of prolactin hormone:* this can cause menstrual irregularities and breast milk secretion. We may need to stop brexpiprazole or use treatments to lower prolactin if this occurs.

### **Rare but serious side effects**

*Metabolic Changes:* Brexpiprazole can increase the risk of diabetes and high cholesterol. This risk is much lower with brexpiprazole than with other atypical antipsychotics.

*Tardive Dyskinesia:* Extremely rarely, brexpiprazole may cause involuntary movements, such as twitching in the face, hands or other muscles. This risk may be greater if you take brexpiprazole for many years or have taken older antipsychotics in the past. This condition can be treated but sometimes it is not reversible.

*Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome:* This syndrome, which is extremely rare on brexpiprazole, consists of sudden, severe muscle

stiffness, fever and irregular pulse and blood pressure.

## **Akathisia**

This side effect is a feeling of inner restlessness which makes it very uncomfortable to sit still. It is not dangerous and may improve with time or a lower dose.

Akathisia can be relieved with several medications including propranolol, betaxolol, pramipexole, gabapentin, trazodone, mirtazapine and benzodiazepines.

*Use in Dementia:* Brexpiprazole can increase the risk of death when used in older adults with dementia. This effect is not seen in people without dementia and may be related to brain-changes that dementia brings.

*Pregnancy:* Brexpiprazole has not been adequately studied in pregnancy. It does pass through breast milk.

### **Interactions**

*Recreational drugs:* Alcohol (in excess of 2 glasses/day) and recreational drugs can prevent brexpiprazole from working.

*Grapefruit juice* can raise brexpiprazole levels.

*Other medications:* These web sites help you check for drug interactions. You should talk with us about the information you find as many drug interactions have only a mild effect:

[www.webmd.com/interaction-checker](http://www.webmd.com/interaction-checker)  
[reference.medscape.com/drug-interactionchecker](http://reference.medscape.com/drug-interactionchecker)

### **How to store and dispose of medication**

- Keep out of the reach of children.
- Store away from heat, direct light and damp places.
- To safely dispose of unwanted pills: Do not pour in the toilet or sink (it will enter the water supply). To prevent children or pets from eating it, mix unwanted pills in a bag

with water and inedible trash (such as coffee grounds) and throw in the garbage.

### **Cost and insurance coverage**

Brexpiprazole is not available in generic form and may require prior authorization in order for your insurer to pay for it. Please check with your pharmacist to see if prior authorization is required as this may take time for us to arrange with your insurer (contact us at [auth@moodtreatmentcenter.com](mailto:auth@moodtreatmentcenter.com)). We can usually provide samples while we try to secure authorization.

Coupons are available at: [www.rexulti.com](http://www.rexulti.com).

### **Quick facts**

Brand	Rexulti
Dose range	0.25-4 mg/day
Sizes	Tabs: 0.25, 0.5, 1, 2, 3, 4mg
Release date	In 2015
FDA-approval	Unipolar depression, schizophrenia

## Comparison of Atypical Antipsychotics

Medication	Unipolar Depression	Bipolar Depression	Mania & Mixed States	Schizophrenia	Irritability due to Autism	OCD	Borderline Personality	Tourette's (muscle tics)	Generic?	Weight Gain	Tiredness
Risperidone (risperdal)	◇		■	■	■	□	□	□	Y	↑	↑
Olanzapine (zyprexa, symbyax)	◆	◆	■	■		□	□	□	Y	↑↑↑	↑↑
Quetiapine (seroquel)	◆	■	■	■		□	□		Y	↑↑	↑↑↑
Ziprasidone (geodon)	◇		■	■				□	Y	—	↑↑
Aripiprazole (abilify)	◆		■	■	■	□	□	□	Y	↑	—
Brexipiprazole (rexulti)	◆			■					N	↑	—
Paliperidone (invega)				■		□			N	↑	—
Asenapine (saphris)			■	■					N	↑	↑↑
Lurisdone (latuda)	■	■	□	■					N	↑	↑
Iloperidone (fanapt)				■					N	↑↑	↑

■ = FDA-approved    ◆ = FDA-approved in combination with an antidepressant    □ = Effective but not FDA-approved  
 Side effects: ↑↑↑ major, ↑↑ moderate, ↑ mild, — rare or none.  
 Note: Lurisdone is close to FDA-approved for depression with mixed features (an agitated depression).

—Chris Aiken, MD, updated 8/18/2015