

# Clonidine

Clonidine (Catapres, Kapvay,) is a blood pressure medication . Research has also identified a wide array of other benefits for clonidine including:

- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) – non stimulant treatment
- Opiate withdrawal
- Post-traumatic stress disorder & social anxiety disorder
- Tourette’s syndrome (tics)
- Self injury (e.g. self-cutting) and aggression when taken as needed
- Itch, sweating, menopausal flushing, tension headaches

## How it works

Clonidine lowers blood pressure by stimulating receptors in the brain causing blood vessels to relax & your heart to beat slower & easier.

For ADHD the exact mechanism is not know, however, it is thought that clonidine extended release works on brain receptors in the prefrontal cortex.

## How should I take it?

Clonidine can be taken with or without food. It must be swallowed whole and never crushed, cut or chewed.

Clonidine should be taken in equal doses in the morning & bedtime. If the doses are not equal, you should take the higher of the 2 doses at bedtime.

## 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.

## How long do I need to take it?

In general, the medicine should be taken at least 6-12 months after the symptoms resolve in order to prevent the problem from returning. That gives the brain time to build up habits of stability.

## What happens if I stop it?

Clonidine should be reduced gradually over 2 to 4 days to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

If you are taking a beta-blocker, it should be withdrawn several days before the gradual discontinuation of clonidine.

## Side effects

Dry mouth, hard stools (constipation), dizziness, feeling sleepy, weakness, headache, upset stomach, stuffy or runny nose, trouble sleeping, low blood pressure.

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.

Weight gain is unusual with clonidine.

Avoid becoming overheated or dehydrated during exercise and in hot weather. Drinking alcohol can increase certain side effects of clonidine.

*Pregnancy:* Clonidine has not been adequately evaluated during pregnancy. It is secreted in breast milk. For ADHD patients, clonidine should generally be discontinued before anticipated pregnancies.

## Overdose

Seek emergency medical attention or call the Poison Help Line at 1-800-222-1212.

Clonidine overdose symptoms may include: low blood pressure, shortness of breath, seizures, slow heart rate, sedation, decreased reflexes, weakness, irritability, irregular heart rhythm.

**Interactions**

Clonidine has increased risk of discontinuation reactions when combined with beta blocker treatment. Tricyclic antidepressants may reduce the lowered blood pressure effects of clonidine.

Clonidine should be used with caution if on other cardiac medication (digitalis, calcium channel blockers).

The web sites below 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:

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

**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 a little water and inedible trash (such as coffee grounds or kitty litter) and throw in the trash.

**Cost and insurance coverage**

Clonidine is available in generic form. If you are paying out-of-pocket, the lowest cost is usually found at Costco (336-970-2300; you do not need to be a member to use their pharmacy).

**Quick facts**

Brands	Kapvay, Catapres
Dose range	Extended release: 0.1 – 0.4 mg/day in divided doses for ADHD Opiate withdrawal: 0.1 mg three times daily Immediate release: 0.2-0.6 mg/day in divided doses for hypertension.
Sizes	ER Tabs: 0.1 mg Immediate release tabs: 0.1 mg, 0.2 mg, 0.3 mg.
Release date	9/28/10 Kapvay
FDA-approval	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Kapvay), Hypertension

—Chris Aiken, MD, updated 4/29/15