

Guanfacine

Guanfacine (intuniv) is an antihypertensive & non-stimulant medication used for the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children ages 6-17.

Research has also identified a wide array of other benefits for Guanfacine including:

- Hypertension (immediate release only)
- Episodic migraine prevention (adults)
- Tourette's syndrome (children/adolescents)
- Oppositional defiant disorder
- Conduct disorder
- Heroin withdrawal

How it works

For ADHD, guanfacine has central actions in the prefrontal cortex of the brain which is thought to be responsible for regulating working memory, attention, impulse control & planning.

For hypertension, guanfacine stimulates certain receptors in the brain stem resulting in decreased heart rate & blood pressure.

How should I take it?

Immediate-release – take at bedtime.

Extended-release – do not take with high fat meals. ER tabs should not be crushed, chewed or broken.

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?

Abrupt discontinuation can result in nervousness, anxiety, & rarely rebound hypertension. To minimize these effects, taper the dose by 1 mg or less every 3-7 days & monitor blood pressure & pulse.

Side effects

Sedation, dizziness, dry mouth, constipation, abdominal pain, fatigue, weakness, low blood pressure.

Weight gain is unusual with guanfacine.

Life threatening or dangerous side effects include low heart rate & low blood pressure (dose-related).

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.

Pregnancy: Guanfacine has not been adequately evaluated during pregnancy. It is unknown, but assumed to be secreted in breast milk.

Overdose

Slow heart rate, drowsiness, low blood pressure, & sluggishness have been observed following overdose with guanfacine. No fatal overdoses of guanfacine have been reported in published literature.

Interactions

Combined use with valproate may increase plasma concentrations of valproate. Certain

drugs such as nefazodone, fluoxetine, fluvoxamine, & ketoconazole may decrease clearance of guanfacine & raise levels significantly.

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

Cost and insurance coverage

Guanfacine 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	Intuniv, Tenex
Dose range	Extended –release 1-4 mg/day Immediate-release 1-2 mg/day
Sizes	Tabs (ER): 1, 2, 3, 4 mg Tabs (IR) 1, 2 mg
Release date	10/27/86
FDA-approval	ADHD, Hypertension

—Chris Aiken, MD, updated 2/15/2014