

Levitra (vardenafil)

Levitra is a treatment for erectile dysfunction. Its effects tend to last around 6 hours and can be taken a few hours before intercourse on an as-needed basis (but do not take more than 2 doses/day unless directed to do so). Blood levels tend to peak ½-2 hours after taking it. Medications similar to Levitra have also been studied for sexual dysfunction in women, including decreased sex drive caused by antidepressants. Levitra may have similar effects on the female clitoris as it does on the male penis.

Mechanism

Inhibits the enzyme phosphodiesterase type 5 (PDE5), enhancing the effects of nitric oxide (NO) in initiating and maintaining erection by keeping muscles of the corpus cavernosum relaxed, thereby increasing blood flow into the penis.

Dosing

Absorption of the drug may be decreased 50% if taken with a high fat meal. Supplied as 2.5 mg, 5 mg, 10 mg, and 20 mg orange tablets (breakable).

Side Effects

Headache, stomach distress, nasal congestion, flushing. Priapism (sustained, uncomfortable erection) is very rare. To help side effects, you can use Tylenol for headache, Sudafed for nasal congestion, and Pepto-bismol for GI distress unless you have a medical condition that would prohibit these.

Heart issues: This medication is considered safe for people with controlled hypertension; mild, stable angina (=chest pain); history of heart attack; mild heart-valve disorders. It should not be taken by people with more severe heart disease (from Princeton Consensus Panel).

Interactions

Should never be taken with nitrate drugs or it can cause dangerous blood pressure drops (e.g. sublingual nitroglycerin and Isordil (isosorbide)). Can be safely combined with any non-nitrate blood pressure medicine. Use with caution in combination with alpha-blockers, such as doxazosin (used for benign prostatic hypertrophy).

Some medications can increase Levitra blood levels, such as cimetidine and erythromycin. Levitra does not affect blood levels of other drugs.

–Chris Aiken, MD, Updated 7/10/2010