

Prazosin

Prazosin is a blood pressure medicine that also improves nightmares and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Its main benefit is in reducing nightmares, but it can also improve daytime symptoms like flashbacks, anxiety, and irritability.

Prazosin is used to treat substance abuse, such as alcohol use disorder and cocaine use disorder. Medically, it is FDA-approved for urinary hesitancy associated with enlarged prostate (BPH) and high blood pressure).

Doxazosin is a similar medication that can be tried if prazosin does not work well. The material in this paper will apply to doxasin as well unless stated otherwise.

How it works

Prazosin reduces the “fight or flight” reaction by blocking alpha-1 (α -1) adrenergic receptors in the brain. This is also known as the *stress* or *adrenaline* response. It treats high blood pressure because these same alpha-1 receptors are also involved in relaxing blood vessels.

How should I take it?

Prazosin can cause drowsiness so should be started at night. Prazosin leaves the body quickly. It’s effects last 6-10 hours, so it is often taken twice a day. Small doses (2-5mg) can be used in the morning to improve daytime symptoms of PTSD.

Doxazosin lasts longer and can be taken once a day.

Some people take prazosin and doxazosin as needed for nightmares. Although it can be hard to know if nightmares are going to happen, they can come and go in clusters so some people have a good sense of when they need to start and stop the medicine. There are no withdrawal problems with that approach.

Side effects

Common: dizziness, headache, and drowsiness.

Rare: fainting.

Very rare: priapism (sustained, painful erections in men)

Use caution when driving or operating machinery after you first start the medicine because it can make you tired. Stand up slowly after starting it or raising the dose; that will help prevent fainting.

Drug interaction

Prazosin can lower blood pressure so should be used with caution when taking with other blood pressure medications.

For more information on drug interactions: 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.

Quick facts

Brand names	Prazosin: Minipress, Vasoflex, Lentopres and Hypovase Doxazosin: Cardura, Cardura XL and Carduran
Dose range	Prazosin: 2-25mg/day. Doxazosin: 8-16 mg/day

—Chris Aiken, M.D., updated 3/11/2017