

Viagra (sildenafil)

Viagra is a treatment for erectile dysfunction. Its effects tend to last around 36 hours (though it peaks in ½-2 hours) and should be taken about 1 hour before intercourse on an as-needed basis (but do not take more than 2 doses/day unless directed to do so). Viagra has also been studied for sexual dysfunction in women, including decreased sex drive caused by antidepressants. Viagra 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), which initiates and maintains erection by keeping muscles of the corpus cavernosum relaxed, thereby increasing blood flow into the penis.

Dosing

Supplied as 20 mg, 25 mg, 50 mg, and 100 mg blue tablets (breakable).

If taken after a high fat meal, absorption is delayed by an hour, and peak plasma levels are decreased by 30%.

Side Effects

Headache, flushing, stomach distress, nasal congestion, abnormal vision, diarrhea. 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 Viagra blood levels, such as cimetidine and erythromycin. Viagra does not affect blood levels of other drugs.

Cost

The 20mg form of viagra is available generic. However, it is still expensive at many pharmacies so shop around if you are paying out of pocket. People find good prices on it at Marley Drug, Costco, and other places listed at www.goodrx.com.

–Chris Aiken, MD, Updated 7/10/2010