

# Olanzapine

Olanzapine (Zyprexa) can help depression, anxiety, agitation, paranoia and hallucinations. It belongs to a class of medications called the atypical antipsychotics, which differ widely in their side effects and benefits. Among these medications, olanzapine has the highest risk of weight gain but can be very effective for depression when other options have not worked.

Olanzapine can take up to 2-3 weeks to work fully but can bring benefits after a few days.

## How should I take it?

Olanzapine can be taken once a day with or without food. Olanzapine's benefits build up gradually in the brain and are not impacted by the time of day you take it. Most people prefer to take it at night as it can cause drowsiness.

Olanzapine is also available as a dispersible tablet that dissolves under the tongue.

Link the time you take olanzapine with a daily routine that you already have in place, such as showering or brushing your teeth. Store the medicine near that routine and take it at the same time so you can build on habits you've already developed.

## 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?

This depends on your diagnosis and which other medications you are taking. Most people with bipolar disorder need to stay on at least one mood stabilizer for the long term in order

to prevent mood swings. If olanzapine helped, it is best to stay on it for at least 6 months before considering going off it. That gives the brain time to build up habits of stability.

## What happens if I stop it?

### Key Points

1. Olanzapine is sedating. Take at night.
2. There are several rare, but serious, side effects with olanzapine (diabetes, high cholesterol, tardive dyskinesia).
3. Check for tardive dyskinesia with the app tdscreen.ai
4. Olanzapine interacts with fatty and sugary foods. We can prevent weight gain if we measure your risk. Check your weight before starting it and 4 weeks later.

Olanzapine is not addictive and does not cause withdrawal symptoms. If you plan to come off olanzapine, it is best to do so slowly (over at least 2 weeks) as that will lower the chance of sudden mood swings returning.

## Checking labs

We will check for diabetes and high cholesterol while taking olanzapine. This medication, as well as bipolar disorder itself, increases the risk of these conditions.

## Preventing weight gain

Olanzapine causes weight gain by making food more rewarding and altering metabolism. Not everyone gains weight on the medicine. We can prevent weight gain on this med if we know that you're at risk. Here's how to tell. Weigh yourself carefully before starting it and again one month later (use the same scale, check in morning, naked, before eating and after going to the bathroom).

It is easier to control your environment than your instincts, so start with that by removing snack foods and sweets from your kitchen.

Another simple technique is to increase your intake of protein – that will stabilize your appetite throughout the day. Eating a high-protein breakfast, within half an hour of awakening, is particularly important. Finally, have a high-protein snack, such as nuts or a protein bar, between meals. This will “spoil your appetite” so you’ll be less likely to overeat during the meal.

Here is a nutrition plan that improves mood, causes weight loss, and has no calorie counting:

[www.chrisaikenmd.com/antidepressantdiet](http://www.chrisaikenmd.com/antidepressantdiet)

### Side effects

Weight gain, drowsiness and restlessness are the most common side effects with olanzapine.

If you don’t tolerate olanzapine, cut the dose in half until the side effects get better and then raise it back up.

*These side effects tend to improve with time or by lowering the dose:* Tiredness, restlessness, muscle aches or stiffness.

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.

### Medical risks

*Low blood pressure:* olanzapine can cause blood pressure to drop when you stand up (leading to dizziness or falls). You can reduce this risk by standing up slowly.

*Elevations of prolactin hormone:* this can cause menstrual irregularities and breast milk secretion. We may need to stop olanzapine or use treatments to lower prolactin if this occurs.

*Metabolic Changes:* Olanzapine can increase the risk of diabetes and high cholesterol.

*Tardive Dyskinesia:* With long term use, this med may cause involuntary movements, such as twitching in the face, hands, or other muscles. This condition can be treated but sometimes it is not reversible. We will check for movements while you are on it, and you can prevent it further by using the [tdcheck.ai](https://tdcheck.ai) app every few months. It detects early signs of the problem better than doctors.

*Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome:* This syndrome, which is extremely rare on olanzapine, consists of sudden, severe muscle

### Akathisia

This side effect is a feeling of inner restlessness that makes it uncomfortable to sit still. It is not dangerous and may improve with time or a lower dose.

Akathisia can be relieved with several medications including propranolol, vitamin B6, betaxolol, pramipexole, gabapentin, trazodone, and mirtazapine.

stiffness, fever and irregular pulse and blood pressure.

*Use in Dementia:* Olanzapine can increase the risk of death when used in older adults with dementia.

*Pregnancy:* Olanzapine has not been adequately studied in pregnancy. It does pass through breast milk.

### Interactions

*Sugary and Fatty Foods:* Olanzapine can interact with these foods to make them more rewarding to the brain and more inflammatory in the stomach, leading to weight gain and potentially diabetes. Remove sugary and fatty foods from your environment while taking olanzapine.

*Recreational drugs:* Alcohol (in excess of 2 glasses/day) and recreational drugs can prevent olanzapine from working.

*Other medications:* These web sites 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](http://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 water and inedible trash (such as coffee grounds) and throw in the garbage.

### **Cost and insurance coverage**

Olanzapine is available as generic. If you are paying out-of-pocket, the lowest cost is usually found at [GoodRx.com](http://GoodRx.com) or Costco (you do not need to be a member to use their pharmacy).

—Chris Aiken, MD, updated 6/26/2025

### **Olanzapine**

Brand	Zyprexa Symbyax (combined with the antidepressant fluoxetine)
Dose range	2.5-20 mg/day
Sizes	Tabs: 2.5, 5, 7.5, 10, 15, 20mg Dispersible: 5, 10, 15, 20mg
Release date	9/30/1996
FDA-approval	Depression and bipolar depression (when combined with the antidepressant fluoxetine). Bipolar mania and mixed states, schizophrenia.