

# Tadalafil (Cialis)

Tadalafil (Cialis) is a treatment for erectile dysfunction. Its effects tend to last around 36 hours (though they peak in 2 hours) so can be taken flexibly before intercourse on an as-needed basis (but do not take more than 2 doses/day unless directed to do so). Despite the stereotype that tadalafil is for men, this type of medication is well-researched in women, and improves sex drive in women with sexual side effects to antidepressants. These “PDE5 inhibitors” affect the clitoris as well as the penis, and enhance dopamine signaling in parts of the brain that are involved in sexual desire.

## How it works

Inhibits the enzyme phosphodiesterase type 5 (PDE5), enhancing the effects of nitric oxide, which initiates and maintains erection by keeping muscles of the corpus cavernosum relaxed, thereby increasing blood flow into the penis. Unlike similar medications (Viagra and Levitra), tadalafil has little effect on PDE6 (thus no visual side effects), but does have an effect on PDE11 (causing backache in some patients).

## Dosing

Supplied as 5 mg, 10 mg, and 20 mg almond-shaped tablets (breakable). The maximum blood levels are reached 2 hours after taking it. It does not interact with food.

## Side Effects

Headache, stomach distress, back pain, muscle aches, nasal congestion, flushing. Flushing is less common than with similar medications (Viagra and Levitra). Priapism (sustained, uncomfortable erection) is very rare.

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.

## Interactions

Should never be taken with nitrate drugs or it can cause dangerous blood pressure drops (e.g. sublingual nitroglycerin and Isordil (isosorbide)). It 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 its blood levels, such as cimetidine and erythromycin. Tadalafil does not affect blood levels of other drugs.

## Cost and Insurance

Tadalafil is available generic but may not be covered by insurance. If paying out-of-pocket, find the lowest cost price at local stores through GoodRx.com, or through online pharmacies at HoneyBeeHealth.com, GeniusRx.com, or CostPlusDrugs.com.

–Updated 6/25/2025 by Chris Aiken, MD

