

Clonidine for Opioid Withdrawal

What is clonidine and why is it prescribed?

- Clonidine belongs to a class of medications called centrally acting alpha-2 agonists. It works by blocking the release of chemical messengers like norepinephrine in the brain that trigger sympathetic nervous system activity.
- Clonidine is used to reduce uncomfortable symptoms of opioid withdrawal such as: sweating, hot flashes, anxiety, agitation, insomnia, nausea, and watery eyes.
- Clonidine was originally used to treat high blood pressure (hypertension), but is now used for various other purposes, such as:
 - Relief of menopausal flushing in women who cannot use hormonal replacement therapy
 - Improving symptoms associated with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
 - Treating tic disorders and sleep disorders
 - Managing irritability in autism or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

How should this medication be used?

- Clonidine comes as an oral tablet in 0.025 mg, 0.1 mg and 0.2 mg strengths.
 - Clonidine tablets can be split in half if needed.
 - This medication can be taken with or without food.
- When treating opioid withdrawal, clonidine is typically dosed as 0.1 – 0.2 mg two to four times a day. The maximum dose of clonidine is 1.2 mg/day.
 - The exact dose and frequency selected will depend on the severity of symptoms and ability to tolerate the medication.
 - In the initial stages of opioid withdrawal clonidine may be used more frequently, but as the withdrawal symptoms reduce, so will the need for clonidine.
- Do **NOT** abruptly stop taking clonidine without talking to your health care provider.
 - Stopping clonidine suddenly can lead to an increase in blood pressure, nervousness, agitation, tremor, nausea and headache.
 - If clonidine is no longer needed, the dose should be gradually reduced over a minimum of 2 to 4 days to reduce chances of a medication withdrawal reaction.

*Note: The 0.025 mg tablet is **NOT** covered by the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) program.

When does this medication start to work?

The peak effects of clonidine are seen within 1 to 5 hours after taking a dose. The effects of clonidine last about 8 to 12 hours.

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What special precautions should I follow?

- Before taking clonidine, talk with your health care provider if you have any of the following:
 - Heart disease; low blood pressure or heart rate
 - Kidney disease
 - Are pregnant or breastfeeding, or this situation is likely in the near future
- Excessive drowsiness can occur if clonidine is taken with alcohol. It is best to avoid alcohol while taking this medication.
- Drowsiness caused by clonidine can impact the mental/physical abilities needed to do certain tasks. It is best to wait until your body adjusts to this new medication or a dose change before driving or operating machinery.
- Clonidine can be poorly tolerated in older adults, especially if they are taking other medications that already lower blood pressure or causes drowsiness.
- Tell your prescriber and pharmacist about all the medication and products you take (prescription, non-prescription, herbals, over-the-counter products, etc.) to minimize the chance of drug interactions.

What should I do if I forget a dose?

- Take the missed dose as soon as you remember it unless it is almost time for the next dose. In this case, skip the missed dose and continue your regular dosing schedule.
- Do **NOT** double dose to make up for a missed dose.

What are the possible side effects of this medication??

All medicines can cause side effects, which can range from mild to severe. The most common side effects of clonidine are:

- Drowsiness
- Dry mouth
- Drop in blood pressure when changing from sitting/lying to a standing position (orthostatic hypotension)
- Dizziness

Clonidine decreases blood pressure. Sometimes this is desired, other times dropping the blood pressure too much can be problematic. If your blood pressure reading is less than 90/60 mmHg, hold off on taking the clonidine dose to prevent the blood pressure from dropping too low. Continue with your next dose when your blood pressure is above 90/60 mmHg.

Remember that your health care provider has prescribed this medication because the benefit to you is considered greater than the risk of side effects. Many people using this medication do not have serious side effects.

What storage conditions are needed for this medication?

- Keep this medication in the container it came in, tightly closed and out of reach of children.
- Store at room temperature, away from excess heat/moisture (not in the kitchen or bathroom).
- If at any point in the future baclofen is stopped, please return any remaining supply to your community pharmacy for proper medication disposal.

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