



## Using *Olanzapine* in Children and Adolescents

This information explains how *olanzapine* can be used as part of a treatment plan with children and adolescents. You may wish to share this information with your family members to help them to understand your treatment options. Since every person's needs are different, it is important that you follow the advice provided to you by your own doctor, nurse and/or pharmacist and speak to them if you have any questions about this medication.



### Overview

Olanzapine (Zyprexa<sup>®</sup>, Zyprexa Zydis<sup>®</sup>) belongs to a group of medications called “atypical antipsychotics”.

### What is olanzapine used for?

Olanzapine can be used to treat several conditions such as:

- Schizophrenia and other thought disorders
- Bipolar Disorder
- Symptoms associated with some types of Mood and Anxiety Disorders such as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD).

Your doctor may be using this medication for another reason. If you are unclear why olanzapine is being prescribed, please ask the doctor.



### How does olanzapine work?

Olanzapine adjusts the functioning of certain chemicals in the brain called dopamine and serotonin. It is believed that some chemicals, like dopamine, are imbalanced in people with disorders like Schizophrenia. The exact way that antipsychotics improve the symptoms of Schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder is not fully known.

### How should olanzapine be taken?

Olanzapine is available in several forms such as, tablets (regular or ones that dissolve in your mouth called 'Zyprexa Zydis'), and a short-acting injection used in cases of emergency. Olanzapine is usually taken once a day with or without food. Olanzapine should be taken at the same time each day as directed by your doctor. Try to connect it with something you do each day (like eating breakfast or brushing your teeth) so that you don't forget.

If you are taking the *Zydis dissolving tablets*, follow these directions. Since this medication will be prescribed in a “blister pack” (not a bottle), you have to be careful about getting the medication out.

1. Use dry hands (wet hands can cause the medication to melt in you hands) to peel off the foil from the back of the blister before removing the tablet (rather than pushing the thin wafer through the foil).
2. Place the tablet on your tongue. The tablet will dissolve quickly and may be swallowed with or without water. Try not to chew it.

Usually, your doctor will start with a low dose of olanzapine that is best suited to your age and size. Then, this dose will be gradually increased over several days or weeks based on your response. You and your doctor can then discuss the best dosage to stay on based on how this medication is tolerated (how well this medication is working and how you are doing with the side effects of the medication) and how well it helps decrease your symptoms.

## When will olanzapine start working?

This depends on what you are using it for. When treating the symptoms of Schizophrenia (such as hallucinations or delusions), it usually takes 3 to 6 weeks or longer before the benefits of olanzapine are noticeable. When olanzapine is working well, you may notice that your thoughts are clearer and more organized. Agitation may be decreased and hallucinations (for example, hearing voices or seeing things no one else sees) may stop completely or be much less. Your mood may be more settled, and you may see a reduction of intense fears and worries. It is important that you continue taking olanzapine regularly, even if you are feeling well, as it can prevent symptoms from re-occurring. If you are taking this medication to help with symptoms of “mania” or sleep, you may notice some changes in the first week or two.

Medications like olanzapine do not work in everyone. If you are not feeling better within 6 weeks, your doctor may recommend you try a different medication.



## How long do I have to take olanzapine?

This depends on the symptoms you have, how frequent they occur and how long you have had them. Most people need to take olanzapine for several months. This allows time for your symptoms to stabilize and for you to regain your functioning. Your doctor will discuss with you the benefits and risks to taking olanzapine. At this time, you can also discuss how long you might need to take this medication.

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Do not stop taking olanzapine without discussing it with your doctor. If you stop taking olanzapine suddenly, it is possible that your symptoms can return.

## Is olanzapine addictive?

No, olanzapine is not addictive and you will not have “cravings” for this medicine like you might with nicotine or street drugs. If you and your doctor decide it is best to stop, your doctor will explain how to safely come off this medicine so you don’t feel negative effects as your body adjusts to being without it.

## What are the side effects and what should I do if I get them?

As with most medications, side effects can occur in those who take olanzapine. Most side effects are mild and temporary. Sometimes the side effects occur before any of the beneficial effects. It is also possible to experience a side effect that you feel is serious or long lasting. If this occurs, speak to your doctor about ways to manage the side effects at your next appointment.

### Common side effects

Should any of these side effects be too troublesome for you, please discuss them with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

- Agitation (*avoid caffeine, from colas and coffee*)
- Blurred vision (*usually disappears in 1-2 weeks; may need to use bright lights when reading or a magnifying glass*)
- Constipation (*increase exercise, fluids, fruits and fibre*)
- Dizziness (*try getting up slowly from a sitting or lying down position*)
- Drowsiness (*try taking the dose at bedtime*)
- Dry mouth (*try chewing sugarless gum, sour candies, ice chips, or popsicles*)
- Headache (*try using a pain reliever like acetaminophen*)
- Increase in hunger (*avoid high calorie foods*)
- Stomach ache (*try taking the medicine with food*)
- Weight gain (*monitor your food intake, increase your exercise*)

**Uncommon side effects** (e.g., those that occur in less than 5% of patients)

Contact your doctor IMMEDIATELY if you have any of these side effects:

- Feelings of restlessness
- Uncontrollable or unusual muscle movements
- High blood sugar
- High blood lipid levels
- Fainting
- Fever
- Confusion
- Fast and irregular heart beat

**What precautions should my doctor and I be aware of when taking olanzapine?**

Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you:

- have any allergies or have had bad reactions to other medications.
- are (or start) taking any other prescription or non-prescription medications. A few medications can interact with olanzapine. Your doctor may need to change the doses of your medications or monitor you carefully for side effects if you are taking medications that interact with olanzapine.
- have a history of heart disease, seizures, kidney or liver disease, a bowel obstruction, diabetes (or a family history of diabetes) or glaucoma.
- are pregnant (or are planning to become pregnant) or are breast-feeding.
- are currently using alcohol or street drugs as these substances can decrease how well olanzapine works for you and/or make you feel drowsy.



**Tip:** When taking this medication, your body may have difficulty regulating your temperature. You need to drink lots of fluids and water to avoid becoming dehydrated. You should avoid doing lots of physical activities on hot days.

**Tip:** Olanzapine can make some individuals feel drowsy, dizzy or slowed down. If you experience these temporary side effects, it is important to avoid operating heavy machinery or driving a car.



**What special instructions should I follow while using olanzapine?**

- Keep all appointments with your doctor. Your doctor may order certain lab tests (like glucose levels, or liver tests) to check how you/your child is responding to olanzapine.
- Do not allow anyone else to use your medication.
- Try to keep a healthy and well balanced diet. Many individuals (about 40%) taking olanzapine gain weight due to an increase in appetite.

**Tip:** Use the Antipsychotic Monitoring Form for Children and Adolescents to help measure your progress on this medication

## What should I do if I forget to take a dose?

If you take olanzapine only at bedtime and you forget to take it, skip the missed dose and continue with your schedule the next day. Do NOT double your next dose. If you take it more than once a day, take the missed dose as soon as possible. However, if it is almost time for your next dose (e.g., within 4 hours), do not take the missed dose or double up on next dose. Instead, continue your regular dosing schedule.



## What storage conditions are needed for olanzapine?

- Keep this medication in the original container, stored at room temperature away from moisture and heat (e.g., not in the bathroom).
- Store dissolving tablets in the original sealed packaging and use immediately once opened.
- Keep this medication out of reach from children.