

# Olanzapine

## Names

The generic drug name is olanzapine (oh-LAN-za-peen). The brand name is Zyprexa®. There may be other names for this medication.

## Why am I taking olanzapine and how does it work?

Olanzapine is used to prevent and/or treat nausea and vomiting caused by cancer treatment. It is more commonly used with chemotherapy that has a high or moderate risk of causing nausea and vomiting. At different doses and with daily use, it can also be used to treat certain psychiatric disorders.

Olanzapine works by binding to and blocking receptors in the brain that are involved in causing nausea and vomiting. These include serotonin, dopamine, and histamine receptors, among others.

## What should I tell my doctor before I begin?

Tell your doctor if you:

- have had an allergic reaction to olanzapine in the past
- use tobacco or alcohol
- have or have ever had liver disease, heart disease, diabetes, narrow-angle glaucoma, prostate problems, low blood pressure, seizures, neuroleptic malignant syndrome (NMS), or severe constipation
- are taking medications for anxiety, allergies, or high blood pressure; sleeping pills; or narcotic pain medications
- are taking carbamazepine (Tegretol®), fluoxetine (Prozac®), fluvoxamine (Luvox®), levodopa (Sinemet®, Stalevo®), omeprazole (Prilosec®), or rifampin (Rifadin®)
- are pregnant, plan to become pregnant, or are breastfeeding
- or any family members have bipolar disorder (manic-depressive illness) or other psychiatric illness, or have tried to commit suicide

**This drug may interact with other medications or cause harmful side effects. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all prescription or over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbal, or diet supplements that you are taking.**

## **What are some possible side effects?**

Most of the side effects listed occur with long term, daily use, not from short term use for chemotherapy-related nausea and vomiting.

- Allergic reaction: itching, hives, swelling in the face, hands, or feet, tingling in your mouth or throat, chest tightness, trouble breathing
- Weight gain
- Fever, sweating, confusion, or muscle stiffness
- Fast or slow heartbeat, dizziness, lightheadedness, and fainting when you get up too quickly from a lying position
- Sleepiness or unusual drowsiness
- Mood changes (restlessness, anxiety, depression, irritability)
- Increased fats, cholesterol, and or sugar in the blood
- Increased blood pressure
- Overheating that makes you feel tired, confused, dizzy, or weak

For some patients, this medication can increase thoughts of suicide. Tell your doctor right away if you start to feel more depressed, have thoughts about hurting yourself, or if you are feeling angry, restless, violent, or scared

## **How can I manage these side effects?**

- Take your medication with food or milk to decrease stomach upset.
- Get out of bed slowly, resting your feet on the floor for a few minutes before standing up.
- If you have diabetes, test your blood sugar more frequently than usual. Call your doctor if your blood sugar is much higher than normal.
- Your doctor may instruct you to follow a low salt (sodium) diet to help control high blood pressure and a low fat diet to control high cholesterol.
- Drink 2-3 quarts of fluids a day to stay hydrated and cool, unless your doctor has told you to limit fluids.
- Ask your doctor for assistance or counseling if you feel you need help with mood changes or are having suicidal thoughts.
- Do not start any new medications or supplements unless approved by your doctor.

## When should I call the doctor?

### Call your doctor immediately if you experience:

- an increase in thirst, urination and blood sugar
- any symptoms of a movement disorder called *tardive dyskinesia* such as lip smacking or puckering, puffing of the cheeks, rapid or worm-like movements of the tongue, or uncontrolled movements of the arms and legs

### Call your doctor as soon as possible if:

- you have nausea that is not relieved by prescribed medication or that prevents you from eating or drinking
- you gain or lose 5 pounds in 1 week
- you have blurred vision or any changes into your vision
- you feel overheated and drinking cool water does not cool you down

## What else should I know about olanzapine?

- When used to treat chemotherapy-related nausea and vomiting, this medication does not usually cause major side effects. A clinical trial in cancer patients reported that the side effects in this setting were manageable and did not increase as chemotherapy cycles continued.
- This medication may cause dizziness and drowsiness. Avoid any activities requiring mental alertness or coordination until you know how it affects you.
- Drink at least 2-3 quarts of fluid (especially water) every 24 hours, unless your doctor tells you otherwise.
- Drinking alcoholic beverages should be kept to a minimum or avoided completely. Discuss this with your doctor.
- This medication may cause liver impairment, and using olanzapine at the same time as other drugs that affect liver function may increase this risk. Make sure your doctor knows about all medications and supplements you take.
- Store this medicine at room temperature, away from heat, moisture, and direct light.
- If you would like more information about olanzapine, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.