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MEDICATION HOW-TO

Propranolol for Akathisia

How to use it for medicine-induced restlessness

A plain guide for people whose prescriber has started propranolol for akathisia: how to take it, how to time it, how to tell if it is working, and what to watch for.

Your prescriber has started **propranolol** for **akathisia** (ak-uh-THEE-zhuh): the deep inner restlessness and urge to move that some medicines cause. Propranolol is a beta blocker that reaches the brain, and it is a common first choice for akathisia. It starts working within an hour or two of a dose, and it is not habit-forming. For many people it turns the restlessness down rather than off, and it often takes a week or so of small changes to get the dose and the timing right. Your prescriber sets both. This guide is about getting the most out of it.

TIMING IT TO THE RESTLESSNESS

Propranolol → Wait 30 to 60 min → Your other medicine → Covered when it peaks

HOW TO TAKE IT

1. **Take it at the times your prescriber set.** Take it at the same times each day, and always with food or always without, because food changes how much you absorb. Many people take it in the morning and again in the evening.
2. **Get ahead of the hard hours.** If the restlessness comes after another medicine, your prescriber may have you take propranolol 30 to 60 minutes before that dose, so it is already working when the restlessness peaks.
3. **Keep taking your other medicine.** Do not stop or skip the medicine behind the restlessness on your own: that can bring your illness back. Your prescriber may also lower it, slow the next increase, or change it.
4. **Have a plan for a very bad night.** Take an extra dose only if your prescriber gave you a rule for one, and follow it exactly. A common rule: one extra dose a few hours after your other medicine, only if the restlessness is still severe and the first dose caused no dizziness or heavy tiredness. Never go past the total for the day.
5. **If you miss a dose.** Take it when you remember, unless the next dose is close: then skip the missed one. Never double up to catch up.
6. **Rate it, and report back.** Rate your restlessness from 0 to 10 each evening on page 2 and bring it to your visit. Judge it over several days, not one night: the dose and timing are often adjusted over a week or more.

SIGNS IT IS WORKING

- You can sit through a meal, a show or a conversation.
- The urge to pace, rock or shift your legs fades, or is easier to ignore.
- Falling asleep gets easier.
- Your 0 to 10 rating comes down.

TELL YOUR PRESCRIBER IF

- It is no better after a few days at a steady dose.
- It is still bad at one time of day. The timing may need to move.
- Tiredness or dizziness gets in the way.
- Your mood drops, or you feel flat or unusually low.
- The restlessness is getting worse.

QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK

QUESTION	ANSWER
How soon will it work?	It starts within an hour or two and peaks about 1 to 4 hours after a dose. Many people notice some relief the first day. Getting the dose and timing right can take a week or more.
Will it make me tired?	Some people feel tired or low on energy, mostly at first. Tell your prescriber if it gets in the way: the dose or timing can often be changed.
How long will I take it?	Often not for good. Akathisia often eases when the other medicine is lowered or changed, or with time. When you no longer need it, your prescriber will step it down gradually rather than stop it at once.
I also take lithium and my hands shake.	Propranolol also eases lithium tremor, so it may help with that too. But a new or worse shake with stomach upset, unsteadiness or drowsiness can mean too much lithium: hold your next lithium dose and call your prescriber right away. Go to the ER for repeated vomiting, a coarse shake, unsteadiness, confusion or slurred speech.
What if it does not help enough?	Tell your prescriber. The dose or timing can change, the other medicine can be lowered or switched, or a different medicine can be added or used instead.
What else helps?	Cut back on coffee and energy drinks, which can feed restlessness. When the urge builds, a slow walk or a stretch can take the edge off.

WHAT YOU MAY NOTICE

- Tiredness or low energy, mostly at first.
- Dizziness when you stand up fast. Stand up slowly, and at night sit on the edge of the bed for a minute before you walk.
- Cold hands and feet, vivid dreams, or less stamina for hard exercise.
- A slower heartbeat. That is how it works. Feeling faint is not: sit or lie down, and call your prescriber.

GOOD TO KNOW

- Tell every clinician, dentist and surgeon that you take propranolol.
- Ask your pharmacist before any new medicine, including ones you buy yourself. Some antidepressants and heart medicines raise propranolol levels or add to its effects.
- Alcohol adds to dizziness. Keep it light, or skip it, while you find your dose.
- With diabetes, it can hide the shaky, racing-heart signs of low blood sugar. Rely on glucose checks.
- If you take it every day, do not stop it suddenly.

MY FIRST WEEK

DAY	RESTLESSNESS (0 TO 10)	WORST TIME OF DAY	SIDE EFFECTS
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			
Day 7			

GET HELP RIGHT AWAY

Call 911 for wheezing or trouble breathing that does not ease, fainting, chest pain, or swelling of the face, lips or throat.

Call your prescriber the same day for dizziness or tiredness that will not settle, a heartbeat that feels very slow or uneven, new wheezing or shortness of breath even if it eases, swollen ankles or quick weight gain, or restlessness that is getting worse.

Akathisia can be hard to bear. If it makes you feel desperate or hopeless, or you have thoughts of harming yourself or someone else, call or text 988 or call your prescriber right away, and call 911 if anyone is in danger.

If anyone takes too much, call Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 right away, even if they seem fine, and call 911 if they collapse, have a seizure, have trouble breathing or cannot be woken. Keep it away from children.

MY PLAN

My propranolol dose and times (from my prescriber):

When I take my other medicine, and how long before it I take propranolol:

My rule for a very bad night (only if my prescriber wrote one):

My next check-in with my prescriber:

My prescriber's phone number:

Questions for my next visit:

Source. Written in new words for patients from the FDA-approved propranolol label and published reviews of akathisia treatment, including a 2024 network meta-analysis. Propranolol is used off label for akathisia. The dose is set by your prescriber.

More free resources → psycho.farm/free

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