
ALPRAZOLAM (Xanax) Fact Sheet [G]

Bottom Line:

Alprazolam is fast acting and effective for generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) and panic disorder, but its short duration of action may contribute to breakthrough symptoms between doses and make withdrawal more difficult.

FDA Indications:

GAD; panic disorder.

Off-Label Uses:

Other anxiety disorders; insomnia; acute mania or psychosis; catatonia.

Dosage Forms:

- **Tablets (G):** 0.25 (scored), 0.5 mg (scored), 1 mg (scored), 2 mg (scored).
- **ER tablets (Xanax XR, [G]):** 0.5 mg, 1 mg, 2 mg, 3 mg.
- **Orally disintegrating tablets (G):** 0.25 mg, 0.5 mg, 1 mg, 2 mg.
- **Oral concentrate (G):** 1 mg/mL.

Dosage Guidance:

- **GAD:** Start 0.25–0.5 mg TID, ↑ by 0.25–0.5 mg/day increments every three to four days as needed and tolerated to max dose 4 mg/day divided TID–QID.
- **Panic disorder:** Start 0.5 mg TID, ↑ by increments of no more than 1 mg/day every three to four days as needed to target dose 4–6 mg/day divided TID–QID. Max dose 10 mg/day.
- **Panic disorder using XR:** Start 0.5–1 mg QD, ↑ by increments of no more than 1 mg/day at intervals of three to four days to target dose 3–6 mg QD.

Monitoring: No routine monitoring recommended unless clinical picture warrants.

Cost: \$

Side Effects:

- Most common: Sedation, somnolence, memory impairment, slurred speech, incoordination, dependence.
- Serious but rare: Anterograde amnesia, increased fall risk, paradoxical reaction (irritability, agitation), respiratory depression (avoid in patients with sleep apnea or on opioids).
- Pregnancy/breastfeeding: Potential risks with exposure in early and late pregnancy; use caution in breastfeeding.

Mechanism, Pharmacokinetics, and Drug Interactions:

- Binds to benzodiazepine receptors to enhance GABA effects.
- Metabolized primarily through CYP3A4; $t_{1/2}$: 11–16 hours.
- Avoid use with other CNS depressants, including alcohol and opioids (additive effects). Potent CYP3A4 inhibitors (eg, fluvoxamine, erythromycin) may increase alprazolam levels; CYP3A4 inducers (eg, carbamazepine) may decrease alprazolam levels.

Clinical Pearls:

- Schedule IV controlled substance.
- Benzodiazepines are very effective immediately for GAD and panic disorder, particularly in the early weeks of SSRI therapy while awaiting onset of therapeutic effect.
- Paradoxical reaction of aggression, agitation, and combativeness is more likely to occur in the elderly or those with brain injury.
- While benzodiazepines are highly abusable, patients with panic disorder rarely self-increase their dose when treated adequately, indicating that tolerance to anxiolytic effects does not occur.

Fun Fact:

There are many slang terms for alprazolam; some of the more common ones are bars, Z-bars, zannies, footballs, blues, and blue footballs.