
TRIAZOLAM (Halcion) Fact Sheet [G]

Bottom Line:

Triazolam gained notoriety as the benzodiazepine that may have caused President George Bush to faint at a state dinner in 1992. It is rarely used due to the higher likelihood for adverse effects (anterograde amnesia, psychiatric disturbances) compared to other benzos.

FDA Indications:

Insomnia (short term).

Off-Label Uses:

Anxiety disorders; acute mania or psychosis; catatonia.

Dosage Forms:

Tablets (G): 0.125 mg, 0.25 mg (scored).

Dosage Guidance:

Start 0.25 mg QHS; max 0.5 mg QHS. Take immediately before bedtime. Use lower doses in elderly.

Monitoring: No routine monitoring recommended unless clinical picture warrants.

Cost: \$

Side Effects:

- Most common: Drowsiness, headache, dizziness, ataxia.
- Serious but rare: Anterograde amnesia, increased fall risk, paradoxical reaction (irritability, agitation); respiratory depression (avoid in patients with sleep apnea or opioid use).
- 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; $t_{1/2}$: 1.5–5.5 hours.
- Avoid concomitant use with other CNS depressants, including alcohol and opioids (additive effects). Avoid use with potent CYP3A4 inhibitors (eg, erythromycin, fluvoxamine, ketoconazole) as they may increase triazolam levels significantly, whereas CYP3A4 inducers (eg, carbamazepine) may decrease triazolam levels; adjust triazolam dosing.

Clinical Pearls:

- Schedule IV controlled substance.
- Rapid onset of effect; best to take when already in bed.
- Due to its short half-life, triazolam is not effective for patients who suffer from frequent awakenings or early wakening; mostly useful for sleep onset.
- Rebound insomnia and other withdrawal symptoms are more likely and more severe with a short-acting benzodiazepine such as triazolam.
- Tolerance to sedative effect may develop within two to four weeks of use, and benzodiazepines affect sleep architecture; thus, long-term use is discouraged.
- May induce more anterograde amnesia than other benzodiazepines; concomitant use of alcohol or use of higher dose (0.5 mg) increases risk.
- Due to studies that suggest the frequency of severe psychiatric disturbances is higher with triazolam compared to other benzodiazepines, the United Kingdom and Brazil have banned it.

Not-So-Fun Fact:

Serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer used triazolam to sedate his victims.