

Doxepin

Silenor, Sinequan (discontinued), Prudoxin and Zonalon (topical), an older antidepressant that is also a gentle sleep medicine

Doxepin is really two medicines in one: a tiny amount is a sleep aid, and a much larger amount treats depression.

WHAT IT TREATS

Insomnia, depression, anxiety

HOW YOU TAKE IT

By mouth at bedtime

WHEN IT WORKS

Sleep in a night; mood 2-4 wks

HABIT FORMING

No

⚠️ IMPORTANT SAFETY WARNING

Antidepressants can bring on new or worse thoughts of suicide, most often in people under **25** and in the first weeks. Anyone taking it should be watched closely for a darkening mood, and should call or text **988** if those thoughts start.

① WHAT THIS MEDICINE DOES

- **Doxepin** blocks histamine, the same signal that makes allergy pills sleepy, which is how it helps you stay asleep.
- In much larger amounts it also raises serotonin and norepinephrine, brain chemicals that lift mood and ease anxiety.
- The tiny sleep amount and the large mood amount act like two different medicines, so check which one you were given.
- As a sleep aid it is not habit forming, and unlike some sleep medicines it does not stop working over time.

⌚ HOW TO TAKE IT

- Take **doxepin** at bedtime, and only when you can stay in bed for a full night. It works within the hour.
- For sleep, do not take it within **3 hours** of a meal. Food slows it down and can leave you groggy in the morning.
- Swallow tablets or capsules whole. If you use the liquid, dilute it as directed and measure with the pharmacy syringe.
- If you miss your bedtime dose and the night is nearly over, skip it rather than taking it close to morning.
- Keep it in its bottle, up high or locked away. In large amounts it is dangerous in **overdose**, so store it safely.

🔧 WHAT TO EXPECT

- For sleep, most people notice a difference the **first or second night**, mostly as fewer awakenings before dawn.
- For depression or anxiety, allow **2 to 4 weeks** for a real change, and up to **6 weeks** for the full effect.
- Morning grogginess can happen early on. It usually fades, and taking the dose earlier at night often helps.
- Working looks like staying asleep longer, waking less often, and feeling more rested rather than knocked out.

♥️ COMMON SIDE EFFECTS

- Drowsiness the next morning: keep your bedtime steady and allow a full night before you need to be sharp.
- Dry mouth: sip water, chew sugar-free gum, and keep up dental visits, because a dry mouth invites cavities.
- Constipation: drink more water, eat more fruit and whole grains, and ask about a gentle stool softener if needed.
- Dizziness when you stand at night: sit on the edge of the bed and pause before walking to the bathroom.
- Nausea or an unsettled stomach: usually mild and short lived, and it fades as your body gets used to the medicine.
- Blurry close-up vision: more common with the larger mood amounts, and it normally eases over a few weeks.

⚠️ CALL YOUR PRESCRIBER OR GET HELP RIGHT AWAY IF

- New or worse thoughts of suicide: call or text **988** now, and tell your prescriber today.
- Doing things while not fully awake, like driving or cooking, means stop and call your prescriber today.
- Chest pain, fainting, or a racing or skipping heartbeat means call **911** right away.
- For any suspected **overdose**, call **911** at once, because too much can harm the heart.

🚫 WHAT TO AVOID

- Skip alcohol. With **doxepin** it deepens the drowsiness and raises the chance of a fall on the way to the bathroom.
- Do not drive or use machinery until you know how your mornings feel on it. Sleepiness can carry past sunrise.
- Tell every prescriber and pharmacist, since it clashes with some antidepressants, allergy pills, and pain medicines.
- Avoid other sedating medicines at night unless your prescriber has said the combination is safe for you.
- If you are pregnant, nursing, or hoping to be, bring it up early so you can weigh it with your prescriber.

⌚ STOPPING IT SAFELY

- Do not stop on your own. Even at sleep amounts, a sudden stop can bring a few rough nights of poor sleep.
- If you take the larger mood amount, stopping fast can cause headache, nausea, chills, and vivid dreams.
- Your prescriber will lower it in steps, usually over **1 to 4 weeks** depending on how long you have taken it.
- If it is not helping, say so at your visit rather than quitting. Other sleep and mood options exist.

❓ QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Was I given the small sleep amount or the larger amount for mood?
- How many hours before bedtime should I stop eating dinner?
- How long do you want me to keep taking this medicine?
- Which of my other medicines add to the drowsiness?

Where this information comes from

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NOTE

Sources are listed in APA 7th edition style. This handout is general information about a medicine, not medical advice, and it does not replace the instructions from your own prescriber or pharmacist. Never start, change, or stop a medicine on your own. If you think you are having a serious reaction, call your prescriber; if you cannot breathe, cannot stay awake, or are thinking of harming yourself, call 911 or 988 right away.