

Hydroxyzine

Vistaril, Atarax (brand discontinued in the US), a calming antihistamine used for anxiety and itching

This medicine takes the edge off anxiety within about half an hour, and it is not habit forming.

WHAT IT TREATS

Anxiety, itching, nausea

HOW YOU TAKE IT

As needed or a few times a day

WHEN IT WORKS

About 15 to 30 minutes

HABIT FORMING

No

✔ This medicine carries **no special FDA safety warning** of that kind.

① WHAT THIS MEDICINE DOES

- **Hydroxyzine** is an allergy medicine that also calms the body, so it eases anxiety, itching, and nausea.
- It is often chosen instead of a benzodiazepine because it is not a controlled medicine and does not cause dependence.
- It works on the day you take it. It does not build up over weeks the way an antidepressant for anxiety does.
- It quiets symptoms, so it pairs well with therapy or a daily medicine that treats the anxiety underneath.

② HOW TO TAKE IT

- You may be told to take it on a set schedule or only when anxiety or itching flares. Follow the plan you were given.
- It can be taken with or without food. A snack helps if it bothers your stomach or makes you feel lightheaded.
- Because it makes most people drowsy, many families use the largest amount of the day at bedtime. Ask about your timing.
- If you take it on a schedule and miss one, take it when you remember unless your next one is close. Never double up.
- Store it at room temperature, away from steam and heat, and out of reach of children and pets.

📈 WHAT TO EXPECT

- Most people feel calmer within **15 to 30 minutes**, and the effect is strongest a couple of hours after a dose.
- It takes the physical edge off, so racing heart, tight chest, and restlessness ease before the worried thoughts do.
- The drowsiness is often strongest in the first several days and then eases as your body gets used to it.
- It is not a cure for anxiety. Working well means the spikes are shorter and smaller, not that they disappear.
- If you or your child needs it every single day for months, that is worth revisiting with your prescriber.

♥ COMMON SIDE EFFECTS

- Sleepiness is the most common effect. Do not drive or ride a bike until you know how it affects you or your child.
- Dry mouth is very common. Sip water, chew sugar-free gum, and take extra care with brushing and dentist visits.
- Blurry vision or feeling foggy can happen. It usually eases after the first week and is worse with larger amounts.
- Constipation is common. More water, fruit, and fiber help, and your pharmacist can suggest a gentle stool softener.
- Feeling dizzy when you stand up happens to some people. Sit on the edge of the bed for a moment before you get up.
- Some children get wired and jumpy instead of sleepy. That is a real reaction, so tell your prescriber if it happens.

⚠ CALL YOUR PRESCRIBER OR GET HELP RIGHT AWAY IF

- Fainting, a racing or pounding heartbeat, or a fluttering chest can mean a change in heart rhythm. Call **911**.
- A spreading rash, blisters, peeling skin, or swelling of the lips or tongue: stop it and get seen the same day.
- Trouble passing urine, a very dry mouth with confusion, or seeing things that are not there: call your prescriber now.
- A seizure, or someone who is hard to wake and breathing slowly: call **911** right away.

🚫 WHAT TO AVOID

- Do not drink alcohol with it. The two together make you far sleepier and less steady on your feet than either alone.
- Opioid pain medicines, sleep aids, and other allergy pills add to the drowsiness. Check every new one with a pharmacist.
- Tell your prescriber about any heart rhythm problem in you or your family, since this medicine can affect heart rhythm.
- Skip it before allergy skin testing, because it can hide the reaction for several days and make the test useless.
- It is not used in early pregnancy. Tell your prescriber right away if you are pregnant or trying to become pregnant.

① STOPPING IT SAFELY

- There is no taper and no withdrawal. You can stop when you and your prescriber agree the need has passed.
- The anxiety or itch it was covering can come back once you stop, which is a reason to have a next step ready.
- Do not change how much you take on your own, even though it is not habit forming. Bring it to your prescriber.
- If you have needed it often for a long stretch, ask about therapy or a daily medicine that treats the cause.

❓ QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Should I take this on a schedule or only when I need it?
- How sleepy will this make me, and when is the safest time of day to take it?
- Does this affect my heart rhythm given my other medicines?
- What is the longer-term plan for my anxiety besides this medicine?

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.