

Oxazepam

Serax (brand discontinued in the US), a benzodiazepine, a gentle, slower calming medicine

Oxazepam eases anxiety and alcohol withdrawal, and it is easy on the liver, so it suits older adults well.

WHAT IT TREATS

Anxiety, alcohol withdrawal

HOW YOU TAKE IT

By mouth, as prescribed

WHEN IT WORKS

1 to 3 hours

HABIT FORMING

Yes, your body adapts

⚠ IMPORTANT SAFETY WARNING

Mixing **oxazepam** with opioids or alcohol can slow or stop your breathing. Your body comes to depend on it, so stopping suddenly can cause seizures and can be life-threatening. Only your prescriber tapers it. Store it safely; others may misuse it.

① WHAT THIS MEDICINE DOES

- **Oxazepam** is a benzodiazepine. It turns down an overactive nervous system, easing anxiety and alcohol withdrawal.
- Your liver clears it in one simple step, so it is often the choice when the liver is not working at full strength.
- It rises slowly and leaves in a middling amount of time, which makes it steadier and less abrupt than faster ones.
- It does not treat what is behind the anxiety. Therapy or a daily medicine usually carries that longer-term work.

⌚ HOW TO TAKE IT

- Take **oxazepam** as prescribed, either on a schedule or when symptoms peak. Give it time before deciding it is not working.
- Because it comes on slowly, take it before symptoms are at their worst rather than waiting until you are desperate.
- You can take it with or without food. A snack with it helps if your stomach feels off afterward.
- If you miss a dose, take it when you remember unless the next one is close. Do not take two at once to catch up.
- Keep it out of reach of children and visitors, ideally locked up. One capsule can seriously harm a small child.

🔗 WHAT TO EXPECT

- You will usually notice a difference in **1 to 3 hours**. That slower start is normal here and is not a sign of failure.
- The calm holds for several hours and then eases off, so it does not stack up as heavily from day to day.
- With daily use over weeks, the same amount often does less. That is your body adapting, and it is expected.
- Working looks like anxiety you can think and move around, or a steadier withdrawal, not feeling switched off.

♥ COMMON SIDE EFFECTS

- Sleepiness is the most common effect, and it comes on gradually rather than hitting you all at once.
- Feeling unsteady is common, and falls are a real risk. Take stairs slowly and turn on a light for night trips.
- Slowed thinking or forgetfulness can happen. Keep a written note of anything important until you see how it settles.
- Dizziness when you stand up quickly can happen. Sit on the edge of the bed for a moment before you get up.
- Dry mouth, mild nausea, or headache can show up. Sip water and eat something small when you take a dose.
- Older adults feel the sleepiness and unsteadiness more strongly, so extra care with stairs and rugs is worth it.

⚠ CALL YOUR PRESCRIBER OR GET HELP RIGHT AWAY IF

- Very slow or shallow breathing, blue lips, or being very hard to wake: call **911** right away.
- A seizure, or heavy shaking and confusion after missed doses: call **911**. A sudden stop can cause this.
- New or worse thoughts of hurting yourself: call your prescriber today, or call or text **988** if you might act.
- A fall with a head injury, or confusion that is new for you: call your prescriber the same day.

🚫 WHAT TO AVOID

- Opioid pain medicine plus **oxazepam** can stop your breathing. Every prescriber and pharmacist you see must know about both.
- Alcohol slows your breathing the same way, and the two together stack up. Skip alcohol on any day you take this.
- Do not drive until you know how it affects you, and not while you feel slowed. The effect builds quietly here.
- Check with your pharmacist before adding sleep aids, antihistamines, or muscle relaxers that also cause drowsiness.
- If you are pregnant, nursing, or planning a pregnancy, tell your prescriber. Do not stop on your own while pregnant.

⌚ STOPPING IT SAFELY

- Never stop suddenly after regular use. Your body adapts, and an abrupt stop can cause seizures that can be life-threatening.
- Your prescriber writes the taper and slows it down if you struggle. Tapering on your own or from an online plan is not safe.
- Rebound anxiety and poor sleep are common while tapering. They fade, and they are not proof you need it forever.
- If you want to come off, raise it early. It is a common goal, and a gradual plan makes it much more comfortable.

❓ QUESTIONS TO ASK

- How long should I wait to feel this before deciding it works?
- Which of my other medicines could slow my breathing with this?
- Given my liver or my age, is this the best fit for me?
- What would a slow taper look like when I am ready to stop?

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.