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If you have anxiety or panic disorder you may be prescribed Xanax. You may also be familiar with its generic name, Alprazolam.

Xanax is a high alert medication, which means if you do not take it exactly as prescribed it may cause illness or injury.

To understand how Xanax works, let's look at how anxiety and panic disorder affects your body.

Your brain is constantly firing information and messages to the rest of your body, telling you what to think, what to feel and what to do. When you are faced with a situation that makes you anxious or causes you to panic, your brain puts you in a state of alert and gets you ready to face the situation.

When it passes, the nerve signals in your brain slow down and your body calms. But when you suffer from anxiety or panic disorders, your brain can't turn off that state of alert.

Xanax works by slowing the activity of the nerves in the brain.

Xanax comes in a tablet or in an orally disintegrating tablet that dissolves under your tongue.

It is available in different doses. You may be prescribed a short-acting dose for anxiety that comes and goes, or you may be prescribed an Extended Release dose to manage your anxiety for longer periods of time.

Orally disintegrating tablets are short acting. Make sure you understand exactly what you are taking and how you are supposed to take it to avoid injury.

Xanax is a powerful medication. Some people should not take it. Do not take Xanax if you are allergic to other anti-anxiety medications like Klonopin or Valium.

Do not take Xanax if you are pregnant, planning to get pregnant, or breastfeeding. Xanax can harm your baby.

Before taking Xanax, tell your healthcare provider if you have a history of: asthma or other breathing problems, glaucoma, liver or kidney problems, or depression or suicidal thoughts.

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Xanax can be highly addictive. If you have a history of abuse of: street drugs, prescription medications, or alcohol, tell your healthcare provider. There may be a different medication available for you.

Some side effects of Xanax include: dizziness, feeling tired, blurred vision, headache, dry mouth, change in appetite, depression, constipation, diarrhea, tremors and nausea.

If you do notice any of these side effects, contact your healthcare provider about how to manage them.

Eating grapefruit, or drinking grapefruit juice, while taking Xanax can increase your side effects. If you do eat grapefruit, eat or drink about the same amount every day to avoid an increase in side effects.

Be aware that you are at an increased risk of falling while taking Xanax. Get up from a sitting or lying position slowly.

Do not drive or operate heavy machinery, including your car, until you know how Xanax affects you.

Do not drink alcohol while taking Xanax. Xanax can increase the effects of alcohol.

If you have an allergic reaction like: trouble breathing, hives, or swelling of your face or throat, call 911.

If you have: hallucinations or unusual behaviors, no fear of danger, thoughts of suicide or hurting yourself, chest pain or fast heartbeats, if you feel like you are going to pass out, or have yellow skin or eyes, call 911 and get help right away.

This is not a complete list of side effects. Make sure you discuss all possible side effects with your healthcare provider.

Take Xanax exactly as prescribed. Do not change your dose or take it for longer than prescribed.

If you are taking Xanax Extended Release, always swallow the pill whole with plenty of water. Do not cut, break, chew, crush, or dissolve this medication.

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When taking an orally disintegrating tablet, make sure your hands are dry and peel back the cover of the package. Place the tablet under your tongue and let it dissolve. Do not swallow the tablet whole or chew it.

Xanax Extended release should be taken at the same time every day. If you miss a dose, take your Xanax as soon as you remember. Do not double dose to make up for a missed dose. Return to your normal medication schedule as soon as possible.

Short-acting Xanax is usually taken as needed.

If you think you have taken too much Xanax, call 911. An overdose can lead to death.

Store Xanax away from moisture and direct sunlight. Your bathroom medicine cabinet is not the best place because of moisture. Do not leave your medication where it can get too hot or too cold. Always store your medication out of sight and out of reach of children to prevent accidents.

Because Xanax can cause dependency, it can be a very desirable drug to addicts. Lock this medication up to prevent stealing and abuse.

When you are done taking Xanax tablets, crush all of your remaining pills and mix them with undesirable trash like kitty litter or coffee grounds.

Do not sell or give your Xanax to anyone else. It is against the law and can seriously harm anyone else taking it. Contact your local police station for more information on proper disposal directions.

Xanax can help you manage anxiety or panic disorder. But it is a powerful medication that should only be taken exactly as prescribed. If you have any questions about Xanax, ask your healthcare provider and pharmacist for more information.