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If you have anxiety, seizures, or muscle spasms, you may be prescribed Valium. You may also be familiar with its generic name, Diazepam.

Valium 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 Valium works, let's look at how anxiety 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, your brain can't turn off that state of alert.

Valium enhances a chemical in the brain called GABA, which helps calm you down. And it slows pain signals going down the spine to help reduce muscle spasms.

Valium comes in a tablet, liquid or rectal gel. Your healthcare provider will decide how much you need to take, but tablets come in 2 milligram, 5 milligram and 10 milligram dosages.

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

Do not take Valium if you have liver disease, breathing problems, glaucoma or sleep apnea.

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

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

Valium 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.

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Some side effects of Valium include: dizziness, feeling tired, feeling lightheaded, or muscle weakness.

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 Valium 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 Valium. Get up from a sitting or lying position slowly.

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

Do not drink alcohol while taking Valium. Valium 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.

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

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

If you have been prescribed liquid Valium, use a dose measuring spoon or medicine cup to make sure you get the correct amount. Do not use a regular kitchen spoon.

You may need to take your Valium several times throughout the day depending on your prescription. Try setting an alert on your phone or watch so you don't forget.

If you miss a dose, take your Valium as soon as possible. If it is almost time for your next dose, skip your missed dose and return to your normal medication schedule.

Do not double dose. If you think you have taken too much Valium, call 911. An overdose can lead to death.

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If you have been prescribed Valium rectal gel, make sure you discuss how to properly administer it with your healthcare provider.

Store Valium 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 Valium 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 Valium tablets, crush all of your remaining pills and mix them with undesirable trash like kitty litter or coffee grounds. Dispose of liquid Valium by flushing it down a drain or toilet.

Do not sell or give your Valium 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.

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