

## Clonidine (say: clon-e-dean) for PTSD

### What is clonidine used for?

- Clonidine (also called Catapres®) is mainly used to help treat the symptoms of migraine, flushing, high blood pressure
- It can sometimes help ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), tics and Tourette's syndrome
- It can also sometimes help some symptoms of PTSD, mostly for the nightmares, where other medicines have not helped
- It is made as tablets.

### What is the usual dose of clonidine for PTSD?

- Clonidine for PTSD usually starts at 25mcg (0.025mg) a day and builds up slowly over several weeks
- The dose can be between 100-600mcg a day (0.1-0.6mg a day)
- The most common dose is around 300mcg a day (0.3mg) at night.

### How should I take clonidine?

- The tablets should be swallowed with at least half a glass of water whilst sitting or standing
- This is to make sure that they reach the stomach and do not stick in the throat
- If you have problems swallowing, the tablets may be crushed and mixed with soft foods (e.g. custard) or dispersed in water.

### When should I take clonidine for PTSD?

- It should be taken at night, usually about an hour before going to bed
- It can be taken with or after food.

### What are the alternatives to clonidine for PTSD?

- There are other medicines (e.g. paroxetine and other SSRIs, venlafaxine, low-dose antipsychotics, doxazocin), therapies and treatments for PTSD.

☞ See our "Handy chart" for PTSD to help you compare the medicines available and how to take them

☞ This will help you discuss your care with your doctor, case manager or pharmacist.

### How long will clonidine take to work for PTSD?

- It probably takes about 4 weeks to start to work for PTSD.

### How long will I need to keep taking clonidine for PTSD?

- You might want or need to keep taking clonidine for several years if it is helping you
- Ask your doctor about this.

### Is clonidine addictive and can I stop taking it suddenly?

- Clonidine is **not** a stimulant and **not** addictive but it is unwise to stop taking clonidine suddenly
- Firstly, clonidine can reduce blood pressure, and stopping it suddenly can lead to blood pressure going up quickly. This can be quite dangerous
- Secondly, the PTSD symptoms can return if clonidine is stopped too soon
- When the time comes, you should come off clonidine by cutting the dose gradually over several weeks
- It normally works out much better if you come off medicines in a planned way at a time when your stress levels are lower, rather than e.g. around life events
- Discuss this with your doctor, case manager or pharmacist.

See our handy fact sheet on 'Coming off Medicines'

### What should I do if I forget to take a dose of clonidine for PTSD at the right time?

- Take the missed dose as soon as you remember unless it is after about the middle of the night
- If you remember after this time, just take the next dose the next evening as normal
- Do not try to catch up by taking two doses at once as you may get more side-effects
- See your doctor if you keep missing doses.

If you have problems remembering your doses (many people do) ask your pharmacist, doctor or case manager about this. Webster, other packs and Apps can help you remember.

### Will clonidine affect my other medication?

Clonidine has a few possible interactions with other medicines. The main ones include:

- The effects of clonidine might be decreased by some tricyclics (e.g. amitriptyline) and antipsychotics, anti-inflammatories (e.g. ibuprofen) and mirtazapine



- Clonidine’s effects might be increased by other drugs that reduce blood pressure e.g. propranolol
- Clonidine might increase the effect of alcohol and other sedatives e.g. benzodiazepines (such as diazepam, lorazepam) and sleeping tablets
- There is no problem with the ‘Contraceptive Pill’.

You must see the Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflet for the full list of interactions. Some of these medicines can still be used together but you must follow your doctor's instructions carefully.

### Can I drink alcohol while taking it?

- There should be no extra problems with alcohol.

### Will I need any blood or other tests if taking clonidine?

- You will need your blood pressure and heart rate tested
- Apart from these, you should not need any extra blood or other tests because you are taking clonidine.

### Can I drive, cycle or operate a boat while taking clonidine?

- You may feel a bit light-headed at first when taking clonidine
- Until this wears off, or you know how clonidine affects you, do not cycle, drive or operate machines.

### What sort of side-effects might I get if taking clonidine for PTSD?

This table shows some of the most common side effects and any you might need to take action on. You **must** also see the Consumer Information Leaflet (CMI) for the full list of possible side effects but do not be too worried by this. Some people get no side effects at all. Others may get some that are not listed. Some side effects are the brain getting used to a medicine and these usually wear off in a few days or weeks. Starting clonidine at a lower dose will help. If you think you might have a side effect to this medicine, you should ask your doctor, pharmacist or case manager.

Side effect	What happens	What to do about it
<b>VERY COMMON</b> ( <i>more than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i> )		
Fatigue	Feeling tired all the time. This may happen early on in treatment and should go away.	If you feel like this for more than a week after starting clonidine, tell your doctor. It may be possible to adjust your dose slightly. It should usually wear off.
Bradycardia	Slow heart beat	
Postural hypotension	You feel light-headed and faint, especially when standing up	You should try not to stand up too quickly, and should try and lie down when they feel it coming on. You should not cycle or drive.
Dry mouth	Not much saliva or spit.	Suck sugar-free lollies. If it is bad, you can use a mouth spray.
<b>COMMON</b> ( <i>fewer than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i> )		
Headache	Having a painful head.	Try paracetamol. Your pharmacist will be able to advise if this is safe to take with any other medicines.
Constipation	When you can't pass a bowel motion (the opposite of diarrhoea).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat enough fibre, cereal or fruit</li> <li>• Drink enough fluid</li> <li>• Keep active and get some exercise e.g. walking.</li> </ul> If this does not help, ask your pharmacist for a mild laxative.
Insomnia	Not being able to fall asleep at night	Discuss this with your doctor. Your dose may be able to be changed.
<b>UNCOMMON</b> ( <i>fewer than about 1 in 100 people might get these</i> )		
Raynaud's phenomena	Where your fingers and toes feel cold and go pale	This is because the blood flow to the fingers and toes may be reduced by the clonidine. See your doctor about this next time you meet.
<b>RARE but important</b> ( <i>can be serious if not dealt with quickly</i> )		
Depression	Feeling low.	Talk to your doctor about this. It usually means your dose is too high.

Lifeline provides 24hr telephone crisis support on 13 11 14 or visit [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au) for information & downloads

**The small print:** This leaflet is to help you understand more about clonidine for PTSD. You **must** also read the manufacturer's Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) Leaflet. You may find more on the internet but beware as internet-based information is not always accurate. Do not share medicines with anyone else.

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