

Guanfacine (say: gwan-fass-een) - information for parents and carers

What is guanfacine used for?

- Guanfacine (also called Intuniv®) is used to help the symptoms of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) in children and young people aged between 6 and 17 years of age
- It is usually used along with methylphenidate or lisdexamfetamine
- Guanfacine is made as prolonged-release tablets.

- ☞ Guanfacine boosts activity in networks in the prefrontal cortex area of the brain. This strengthens memory and reduces the risk of being distracted or impulsive
- ☞ For ADHD, about 2 in 3 (60%) of young people's symptoms improve with guanfacine
- ☞ It's not a stimulant like methylphenidate/lisdexamfetamine

What is the usual dose of guanfacine?

- Guanfacine has to be started slowly, starting from 1mg a day, then increased by an extra 1mg a day, every week up to 4 (for age 6-12) to 7mg a day (ages 13-17), depending on age and weight
- If used with other ADHD medicines, the top dose of guanfacine is usually 4mg a day
- Your doctor will tell you about adjusting the dose.

How should my child take guanfacine?

- Swallow the tablets whole (do **not** crush or chew them) with at least half a glass of water whilst sitting or standing, so they reach the stomach and do not stick in the throat
- It can be taken with or after food, but not with a high fat meal.

When should my child take guanfacine?

- Guanfacine can be taken in the morning or evening, but take it at a regular time each day
- If the child feels sleepy when taking it the dose can be given at bedtime.

What are the alternatives to guanfacine?

- There are other medicines (e.g. methylphenidate, lisdexamfetamine, atomoxetine), therapies and treatments for ADHD.

- ☞ See our "Handy chart" for ADHD to help you compare the medicines available
- ☞ This will help you talk to your prescriber, nurse, pharmacist or other healthcare professional.

How long will guanfacine take to work?

- It may take up to about 2-3 weeks from starting for the effect to start to kick in properly
- The effect will then build as the dose is increased.

How long will my child need to keep taking guanfacine for?

- Your child might need to keep taking guanfacine for several years. Ask your prescriber about this.

Is guanfacine addictive and can my child stop taking it suddenly?

- Guanfacine is not a stimulant and not addictive
- However, it is unwise to stop guanfacine suddenly as their blood pressure can increase quickly. This could be dangerous
- When the time comes to stop guanfacine please talk with your prescriber about this
- You can work out a way of reducing the dose slowly over a few of weeks. This would usually be something like a drop of 1mg a day every four to seven days
- It normally works out much better if stopping medication in a planned way at a time when stress levels are lower, rather than e.g. around exams or life events.

See our handy fact sheet on 'Coming off Medicines'

What should I do if my child forgets to take a dose of guanfacine at the right time?

- If you miss the evening dose, start again the next night
- It might be possible to give a half dose the next morning (ask your prescriber about this)
- If the morning dose is missed give it in the afternoon but not the evening
- Do not try to catch up by giving two or more doses at once
- If more than two doses are missed your child will need to start again slowly from 1mg a day (as if he or she were starting again) or the child's blood pressure could drop quickly. This could be dangerous.

If your child has problems remembering your doses (as many people do) ask to see our Handy Fact Sheet "Remembering to take your medicines".

Will guanfacine affect other medication?

Guanfacine can interact with many other medicines:

- This includes some antibiotics and treatments for high blood pressure
- There is no problem with the 'Contraceptive Pill'
- Make sure any prescriber and/or pharmacist who treats your child knows they are taking guanfacine.

You **must** see the Patient Information Leaflet (PIL) for the full list. Some of these medicines can still be used together but you will need to follow your doctor's instructions.

Can my child drink alcohol while taking it?

- It can make some people sleepy so taking alcohol might make your child more sleepy.

Will my child need any blood or other tests?

- Your child will need checks on blood pressure, heart rate and sedation every week when they start guanfacine and then at least every three months for the first year. After that they should be checked at least twice a year.

Can my child cycle or drive while taking it?

- Your child may feel a bit sleepy, dizzy or faint at first when taking guanfacine
- Until this wears off, or you know how it affects him or her, do not cycle, drive or operate machines.

What sort of side-effects might my child get if taking guanfacine?

This table shows some of the most common side effects and any you might need to take action on. You **must** also see the maker's Patient Information Leaflet for the full list of possible side effects but do not be worried by this. Some people get no side effects at all. Some side effects are the brain getting used to a medicine and these usually wear off in a few days or weeks. This is why the dose is slowly increased. If you think your child might have a side effect to this medicine, you should ask your prescriber, pharmacist or other healthcare professional.

Side effect	What happens	What to do about it
VERY COMMON (<i>more than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Sleepiness	Feeling sleepy, drowsy or sluggish for a few hours after each dose	This should wear off after 2-3 weeks. If not, your child can try sticking on 2mg a day for an extra week or so until it settles down. Give it at night so your child is asleep when they feel sleepy. Your child can move to taking guanfacine during the day after a few weeks when the sleepiness has worn off.
Headache	Complaining of a painful head.	Try paracetamol. Your pharmacist will be able to advise if this is safe to take with any other medicines.
Stomach pain	Nausea and vomiting, and flatulence	Give the tablets with or after food. Your child may need something to help this so ask your prescriber.
Feeling tired	Feeling tired all the time. This may happen early on in treatment and should go away.	If your child feels like this for more than a week after starting guanfacine, tell your doctor. Try taking the dose 2-3 hours before bedtime. It usually wears off.
COMMON (<i>fewer than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Anorexia	Loss of weight, not feeling hungry.	If this is a problem, contact your doctor, dietician or pharmacist for advice. It normally wears off after a few weeks. You can use high calorie drink and foods to help if this becomes a problem.
Weight gain	Putting on weight over the first year	Weight should be checked by your doctor.
Poor sleep	Not being able to fall asleep at night	Try giving the dose in the morning.
Bradycardia	Slow heart rate	Discuss with your doctor next time you meet.
Gastrointestinal disturbance	Feeling or being sick, constipation, diarrhoea	Try giving it with food (but not a high fat meal), drink enough liquid and keep active. If it carries on talk to your prescriber.
RARE but important (<i>can be serious if not dealt with quickly</i>)		
Hypotension	Low blood pressure. This can happen in about 1 in 30 children. It will be picked up in the regular checks.	See your doctor in the next few days if your child feels faint, feel really dizzy or depressed.
Depression	Feeling low, loss of interest or pleasure, low energy	
Syncope	Fainting, caused by low blood pressure, in less than 1 in 100 people.	

The small print: This leaflet is to help you understand more about guanfacine. You **must** also read the manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet (PIL). You may find more on the internet but beware as internet-based information is not always accurate. The 'Handy charts' will help you compare the main medicines for each condition, how they work and their side effects. Go to our website for fuller answers to these and many other questions.

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