

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 adolescents aged between 6 and 17 years of age
- Guanfacine is made as prolonged-release tablets.

- ☞ Guanfacine boosts parts of 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?

- The usual dose of depends on age and weight
- The dose of guanfacine is built up slowly starting at 1mg a day and increasing every week to 4mg a day (for age 6-12), and to 4mg to 7mg a day for ages 13-17 (depending on your child's weight).

How should my child take guanfacine?

- 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
- It can be taken with or after food, but not with a high fat meal.

When should my child take guanfacine?

- Try to give the guanfacine at a regular time each day. It can be taken in the morning or evening
- 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 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 the evening dose is missed, 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 (as if he or she were starting again) or the child's blood pressure could drop quickly. This could be dangerous.

If you have problems remembering your doses (many people do) ask your pharmacist, doctor or nurse. There are some special packs, boxes and devices that can help you remember.

Will guanfacine affect other medication?

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

- Guanfacine needs extra care with other medicines that might alter heart rhythm or blood salts, or reduce blood pressure e.g. antipsychotics as these may cause a drop in blood pressure, particularly when standing or sitting up
- It can increase the effects of valproate and the sedative effects of benzodiazepines and others

- The effects of guanfacine can be increased by some antifungals (e.g. ketoconazole), clarithromycin, buprenorphine and chloramphenicol
- The effects of guanfacine can sometimes be decreased by rifampicin (for infections like TB), carbamazepine, phenytoin and St. John's wort.

See the Patient Information Leaflet (PIL) for the full possible list. Not all of these interactions happen in everyone. Some of these medicines can still be used together but you will need to follow your doctor's instructions carefully.

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. Starting slower may help. 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. Try giving 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. It may be possible to adjust the dose slightly. It should usually wear 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	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	
Syncopal	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.