

# Your child's medication: Clonazepam for medical sleep disorders

## Information for children, families and carers

We have given you this factsheet because your child has been diagnosed with a medical sleep disorder and has been prescribed a medication called clonazepam to help treat this. This factsheet explains how your child should take clonazepam. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

Please note that our information may differ from that provided by the medication manufacturer. This is because their information usually relates to adults.

### Clonazepam

Clonazepam belongs to a group of medications called benzodiazepines (a type of sedative medication). It is often used to treat epilepsy, but it is also used to relieve symptoms of a variety of medical sleep disorders, such as parasomnias (a range of sleep disorders that involve abnormal movements, speech, behaviours, emotions and actions occurring when a person is asleep) and sleep-related rhythmic movement disorder (repeated body movements that usually occur as a child is falling asleep or is almost asleep).

### How does clonazepam help to treat medical sleep disorders?

Clonazepam works by increasing the amount of a calming chemical in your child's brain called gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA). This can:

- relieve anxiety
- stop seizures
- relax tense muscles
- reduce the type of sleep that can be associated with sleep disorders
- reduce how often your child wakes up during the night
- improve the quality of your child's sleep

## Is clonazepam suitable for everyone?

Your child should not take clonazepam if they have:

- a hypersensitivity to benzodiazepines and other substances in the medication
- severe respiratory problems
- myasthenia gravis (a rare long-term condition that causes muscle weakness)
- sleep apnoea (a condition in which a person's breathing stops and restarts many times while they sleep)
- phobic (an overwhelming and debilitating fear of an object, place, situation, feeling or animal) or obsessive (thinking about something or someone, or doing something, too much or all the time) traits

Clonazepam should be used with caution if your child has:

- a history of mania (a psychological condition that causes a person to experience unreasonable euphoria, very intense moods, hyperactivity, and delusions)
- obsessional behaviour (when a person feels they must do something over and over)
- renal problems

## How to take clonazepam

Clonazepam comes as:

- a tablet
- an oral solution (a liquid)

Your child should take the medication once a day at night, one hour before they go to bed (with or without food).

If your child is unable to swallow tablets, you can crush the tablets and your child can take them with a spoonful of soft food, such as yoghurt or mashed potato.

The medication should start to work an hour after your child takes it.

**Your child should not stop taking clonazepam suddenly or without the support of our sleep clinic.**

## Dose

Clonazepam comes in different strengths. **Please always check that your child has been prescribed the correct medication and strength.** We will prescribe your child a low dose to start with. We will increase the dose gradually to avoid side effects and to control your child's symptoms. We will discuss your child's dose regime with you.

It is important that you follow the instructions about how much your child should take. The dose will be shown on the medication label.

## Storage

Keep your child's medication in a locked cupboard.

## Other medications

Check with us before your child takes any new medication while they are taking clonazepam. Check with your pharmacist before your child takes any over-the-counter medications.

## Alcohol

Your child must not have any alcohol while they are taking clonazepam.

## Contraception

Clonazepam is not known to interact with hormonal contraception.

## Pregnancy and breastfeeding

Clonazepam should only be taken during pregnancy if the benefits outweigh the risks.

Contact us for advice if your child:

- is pregnant
- thinks they may be pregnant
- is planning to have a baby
- is breastfeeding

## Travel

If you need a letter in order to travel abroad with your child's medication, please contact us as soon as possible so we can arrange this.

## Monitoring

Before your child starts taking clonazepam, we will check their height and weight. We will need to see your child in our sleep clinic regularly while they are taking clonazepam. Please note that clonazepam will not be prescribed as a long-term medication.

## What if my child takes too much clonazepam?

It can be dangerous to take too much clonazepam.

If your child takes too much clonazepam, call NHS **111** for advice and have the medication or packaging to hand. In an emergency, take your child to your nearest emergency department. Make sure to take your child's medication container and packaging in with you, even if it is empty. This will help the healthcare professional caring for your child.

## What if my child misses a dose of clonazepam?

If you remember before your child is asleep, give them their missed dose. If not, skip that dose and give your child their next dose at the usual time. **Never give your child a double dose of clonazepam.**

## What if my child is sick (vomits) after taking a dose of clonazepam?

Do not repeat the first dose. This is because it can be difficult to know how much was absorbed.

## Side effects

As with all medications, there may be side effects with taking clonazepam. We will prescribe your child a low dose to start with, to reduce the chance of side effects.

### Common side effects

- Anxiety or mood changes - Keep an eye on how your child is feeling or behaving.
- Gastrointestinal problems and nausea (feeling sick) – To help with this, your child should eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of water.
- Headaches - To help with this, your child should drink plenty of water, and if needed, they can take a mild pain relief medication, such as paracetamol. Always read the label or instructions that come with the medication before giving it to your child.
- Drowsiness - Your child should not ride a bike or drive a car if the medication makes them feel sleepy, dizzy or light-headed, clumsy or unable to concentrate or make decisions.

### Less common side effects

Very rarely clonazepam can affect a person's blood. If you notice your child has more infections than usual, such as colds, stomach bugs, skin or chest infections, contact us straight away for advice.

For a full list of possible side effects, please see the manufacturer's leaflet that comes with your child's medication.

If your child experiences any of the side effects listed above, or you have concerns about your child, please contact us for advice. Outside of our working hours, contact NHS **111** for advice.

### General advice for medication

- Try to give your child their medication at the same time(s) each day to help you remember.
- Never give your child's medication to anyone else, even if their condition appears to be the same, as this could be dangerous.
- **If you think that someone else has taken your child's medication by accident, contact the person's general practitioner (GP) or NHS 111 immediately, or take them to the nearest emergency department if they are unwell.**
- If you think the medication is not working, contact us but continue to give the medication as usual. Do not give any extra doses as this may be dangerous.
- Make sure that your child always has enough medication. Order a new prescription at least two weeks before it runs out.
- Make sure that the medication your child has at home has not reached the 'best before' or 'use by' date on the packaging. Give old medication to your local pharmacy to dispose of.

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

Sleep clinic

Telephone: **023 8120 5922** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

Email: [paedssleepadmin@uhs.nhs.uk](mailto:paedssleepadmin@uhs.nhs.uk)

## Useful links

[www.nhs.uk/medicines/clonazepam](http://www.nhs.uk/medicines/clonazepam)

[www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk/advice-guides/general-information-about-medicines/unlicensed-medicines](http://www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk/advice-guides/general-information-about-medicines/unlicensed-medicines)

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