

RISPERIDONE ('Risperidal')

Ris – perry – done

Why have I been prescribed risperidone?

Risperidone is used to help treat schizophrenia, psychosis and many other similar conditions.

When they have schizophrenia, many people hear voices talking to them or about them. They may also become suspicious or paranoid. Some people also have problems with their thinking and feel that other people can read their thoughts. These are called "positive symptoms". Risperidone can help to relieve these symptoms. Many people with schizophrenia also experience "negative symptoms". They feel tired and lacking in energy and may become quite inactive and withdrawn. Risperidone may help relieve these symptoms as well.

Risperidone may also be prescribed for people who have had bad side effects with older types of medicines, such as strange movements and shaking. Risperidone does not usually cause these effects. Older drugs may also increase levels of the hormone prolactin. This can cause a loss of sexual drive and impotence and affect women's periods. Risperidone does not cause these effects.

What exactly is risperidone?

Risperidone is one of a group of medicines used to treat schizophrenia and similar disorders. These illnesses are sometimes referred to as psychoses, hence the name given to this group of medicines which is the "antipsychotics". They are sometimes also called the neuroleptics or (incorrectly) major tranquillisers.

Risperidone is a newer type of antipsychotic. It may help people who have negative symptoms and have not got much better on the older antipsychotics. Risperidone may also be better for people who have had bad side effects from the older drugs. The trade or brand name for risperidone is '*Risperdal*'.

Is risperidone safe to take?

It is usually safe to have risperidone regularly as prescribed by your doctor, but it doesn't suit everyone. Let your doctor know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care may be needed:

- a) if you have Parkinson's disease, or suffer from liver, kidney, or heart trouble;
- b) if you are taking any other medication;
- c) if you are pregnant, breast feeding, or wish to become pregnant.

What is the usual dose of risperidone?

The starting dose of risperidone is usually 2mg a day. The normal dose is between 4mg and 8mg a day. The maximum dose of risperidone is 16mg a day.

How should I take risperidone?

Look at the label on your medicine; it should have all the necessary instructions on it. Follow this advice carefully. If you have any questions, speak to your pharmacist, doctor or nurse. Most medicines are now dispensed with an information leaflet for you to read.

What should I do if I miss a dose?

Never change your dose without checking with your doctor. If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember, as long as it is within a few hours of the usual time.

When I feel better, can I stop taking risperidone?

No. If you stop taking risperidone your original symptoms may return, but this may not be for 3 to 6 months after you stop the drug. You and your doctor should decide together when you can come off it. Most people need to be on risperidone for quite a long time, sometimes years. This is not thought to be harmful. Risperidone is not addictive.

What will happen to me when I start taking risperidone?

Antipsychotics do not work straight away. For example, it may take several days or even weeks for some of the symptoms to reduce. To begin with, most people find that this medication will help them feel more relaxed and calm. Later, after one or two weeks, other symptoms should begin to improve.

Unfortunately, you might get some side effects before you start to feel any better. Most side effects should go away after a few weeks. Look at the table over the page. It tells you what to do if you get any of the usual side effects. Not everyone will get the side effects shown. There are many other possible side effects. Ask your pharmacist, doctor or nurse if you are worried about anything else that you think might be a side effect.

Side effect	What is it?	What should I do if it happens to me?
COMMON		
HEADACHE	When your head is painful and pounding.	You can take aspirin or paracetamol for this.
HYPOTENSION	A low blood pressure. You may feel faint when you stand up.	Try not to stand up too quickly. If you feel dizzy, don't drive. This dizziness is not dangerous
RAISED PROLACTIN	Prolactin is a natural chemical we all have. High levels can affect periods in women or cause impotence in men. It may also cause breast tenderness and milk secretion, in men as well as women.	This sometimes wears off in a few weeks, but discuss this with your doctor anyway. It may be that a change in dose or different drug will help.
RESTLESSNESS or AGITATION	Being more on edge.	Discuss relaxation methods you're your doctor.
UNCOMMON		
AKATHISIA	You feel restless, unable to feel comfortable unless you are moving.	Tell your doctor about this. It may be possible to change your drug or dose, or give you something to reduce these feelings.
CONSTIPATION	Feeling "bunged up" inside. You can't pass a motion or stool.	Eat more fibre e.g. bran, fruit and vegetables. Do more walking. Make sure you drink plenty of fluid. A mild laxative from a pharmacy might help.
DROWSINESS	Feeling sleepy or sluggish. It can last for a few hours after taking your dose.	Don't drive or use machinery. Ask your doctor if you can take your risperidone at a different time.
INSOMNIA	Not being able to get to sleep at night.	Discuss this with your doctor. He or she may change the time of your dose.
MOVEMENT DISORDERS	Feeling shaky or having a tremor. Your neck may twist back. Your eyes and tongue may move on their own.	Your doctor may be able to give you something for it. Alternatively, your doctor can change your medication to one that doesn't have this side effect. This is more common at doses above 6mg a day.
WEIGHT GAIN	Eating more and putting on weight, especially just after you start taking risperidone.	Avoid fatty foods like chocolate, crisps and fizzy drinks. A diet full of vegetables and fibre will usually help, as will physical activities such as walking. If it becomes a problem or you are worried, ask to see a dietician.
RARE		
BLURRED VISION	Things look fuzzy and you can't focus properly.	Don't drive. See your doctor if you are worried. You won't need glasses.
NMS	Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome includes a high body temperature, muscle stiffness and being unable to move.	It usually occurs within a few weeks of a dose change. Contact your doctor immediately. Keep cool, with fans or cool water.
SKIN RASHES	Blotches seen anywhere.	Stop taking the risperidone and see your doctor now.

What about alcohol?

It is officially recommended that people taking risperidone should not drink alcohol. This is because both risperidone and alcohol can cause drowsiness. If the two are taken at the same time, severe drowsiness can result. This can lead to falls or accidents. As well as this, drinking alcohol often makes psychosis worse. Excessive drinking is especially likely to do this. Once people are used to taking medication, they can sometimes drink alcohol in small amounts without any harm. Avoid alcohol altogether for the first one or two months. After this, if you want a drink, try a glass of your normal drink and see how you feel. If this doesn't make you feel drowsy, then it is probably OK to drink small amounts. It pays to be very cautious because alcohol affects people in different ways, especially when they are taking medication.

Don't stop taking your medication because you fancy a drink. Discuss any concerns you may have with your doctor, pharmacist or nurse. If you do drink alcohol, drink only small amounts. Never drink any alcohol and drive.

Remember, leaflets like this can only describe some of the effects of medication. You may find other books or leaflets also useful. If you have access to the internet you may find a lot of information there as well, but be careful, as internet based information is not always accurate.



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