



Overview

Pimozide (Orap®) belongs to a group of medications called first-generation antipsychotics (also known as “typical antipsychotics”).

What is *pimozide* used for?

Although it is called an antipsychotic, pimozide is more commonly used in the treatment of movement disorders such as motor and vocal tics and in patients with Tourette syndrome.

Your doctor may be using this medication for another reason. If you are unclear why this medication is being prescribed, please ask your doctor.



How does *pimozide* work?

Pimozide affects the levels of a brain chemical called dopamine. The exact way pimozide improves the symptoms of Tourette syndrome and other conditions is not fully known.

How well does *pimozide* work in children and adolescents?

Like many medications used to treat childhood disorders, pimozide has not been approved for use in Canada for children and adolescents. Current evidence supports the use of pimozide for the treatment of Tourette syndrome in children and adolescents. Pimozide is approved for the treatment of Tourette syndrome in adolescents in the United States. It has been shown to reduce the number of motor and vocal tics, as well as the severity of symptoms. It is generally used after other treatments for Tourette syndrome such as haloperidol (Haldol®) or risperidone (Risperdal®) are found to be ineffective or intolerable. However medication treatment choices can vary depending on the individual situation. Whenever possible, adding behavioural therapy and counseling to pimozide may increase the chance for benefit. Pimozide has been used along with stimulants in the management of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) in children and adolescents with Tourette syndrome.

How should *pimozide* be taken?



Pimozide is usually taken once a day with or without food. If you find that taking this medication causes stomach discomfort, try taking it with food. This medication should be taken at the same time each day as directed by your doctor. Try to connect it with something you do each day (like eating breakfast or brushing your teeth) so that you don't forget. Try to avoid alcohol while taking pimozide.

Usually, your doctor will start with a low dose of pimozide that is best suited to your age and weight. This dose will then be slowly increased over several days or weeks based on how you respond to it. This medication is only available in tablet form.

When will *pimozide* start working?

Improvements may be seen in as little as 1 – 2 weeks. However, it can sometimes take up to 6 weeks to see the full benefits of this medication. Medications like pimozide do not work for everyone. If your symptoms have not improved within 6 weeks, your doctor may recommend switching you to a different medication.



How long do I have to take *pimozide*?

This depends on the symptoms you have, how frequently they occur, and how long you have had them. Most people with tic disorders or Tourette syndrome need to take pimozide for several months. Your doctor will discuss with you the benefits and risks of taking pimozide with you. At this time you can also discuss how long you might need to take this medication.

Do not increase, decrease, or stop taking pimozide without discussing it with your doctor. If you stop taking pimozide suddenly, it is possible that your symptoms may return or you may have a bad reaction.

Is *pimozide* addictive?

No, pimozide is not addictive and you will not have “cravings” for this medication like you might with nicotine or street drugs. If you and your doctor decide it is best to stop using pimozide, your doctor will explain how to safely come off this medication so you don’t feel negative effects as your body adjusts to being without it.

What are the side effects of *pimozide* and what should I do if I get them?

As with most medications, side effects may occur when taking pimozide. However, most side effects are mild and temporary. Sometimes the side effects may occur before any of the beneficial effects. It is also possible for some individuals to experience side effects that they feel are serious or long-lasting. If this occurs, speak to your doctor about ways to manage them. Below are some of the more common side effects of taking this medication. In brackets are suggested ways to lessen these effects.

Common side effects

Side effects are usually more common when starting a medication or after a dose increase. If any of these side effects is troublesome for you, please discuss them with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

- Drowsiness, dizziness (*try getting up slowly from a sitting or lying down position*)
- Headache (*try using a pain reliever like acetaminophen (plain Tylenol®)*)
- Blurred vision (*this effect often becomes less noticeable over time*)
- Dry mouth (*try chewing sugarless gum or sucking hard sugar-free candies, ice chips, or popsicles*)
- Constipation (*increase exercise, fluids, vegetables, fruits, and fiber*)

Uncommon side effects (e.g. those that occur in less than 5% of patients)

Contact your doctor **IMMEDIATELY** if you have any of these side effects:

- Breast tenderness or discharge
- Fast or irregular heartbeat
- Severe dizziness, passing out, or balance difficulties
- Feelings of restlessness
- Muscle spasms or cramps
- Rash

Medications similar to pimozide are sometimes associated with a very rare side effect called “neuroleptic malignant syndrome”. The symptoms may include severe muscle stiffness, high fever, increased heart rate and blood pressure, irregular heartbeat (pulse) and sweating. Contact your doctor right away if this occurs.

Medications similar to pimozide have been associated with a serious side effect called “tardive dyskinesia”. This is a side effect that can occur in patients who take antipsychotics for several years and can potentially become permanent. It involves involuntary movements of some muscles in the body like the lips, tongue, hands and neck. Gradually reducing and stopping pimozide with your doctor’s help (at the first signs of these movements occurring) or switching to another medication can decrease the chance of having this side effect continue.

Tip: Pimozide can make some individuals feel drowsy, dizzy, or slowed down. If you experience these temporary side effects, it is important to avoid operating heavy machinery or driving a car.

What precautions should my doctor and I be aware of when taking *pimozide*?

Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you:

- Have any allergies or have experienced a reaction to a medication.
- Are lactose intolerant (pimozide tablets contain lactose)
- Are taking or plan to start taking any other prescription or non-prescription medications (including herbal products). Some medications can interact with pimozide. Your doctor may need to change the doses of your medications or monitor you carefully for side effects if you are taking medications that interact with pimozide.
- Have epilepsy or have ever had a seizure, trouble urinating, glaucoma, kidney or liver disease, or a personal or family history of a heart condition.
- Miss a period, are pregnant (or are planning to become pregnant) or are breast-feeding.
- Are currently using alcohol or street drugs. These substances may interfere with how well pimozide works for you, can make you feel drowsy, and can increase your risk for a seriously abnormal heart rhythm.



Tip: When taking pimozide, your body may have difficulty regulating your temperature. Make sure you drink lots of fluids and water to avoid becoming dehydrated. You should avoid doing a lot of physical activities on hot days.

What special instructions should I follow while using *pimozide*?

- Keep all appointments with your doctor and the laboratory. Your doctor may order certain lab to monitor for side effects of pimozide.
- Do not allow anyone else to use your medication.

Tip: Avoid eating grapefruit or drinking grapefruit juice while taking pimozide. Grapefruit can affect how pimozide works for you, and combined use may lead to serious side effects.

What should I do if I forget to take a dose of *pimozide*?

If you take pimozide regularly and you forget to take it, take the missed dose as soon as you remember. If it is almost time for your next dose (e.g. within 4 hours), skip the missed dose and continue with your regular dosing schedule. Do NOT double your next dose.



What storage conditions are needed for *pimozide*?

- Keep this medication in the original container, stored at room temperature away from moisture and heat (e.g. not in the bathroom or kitchen) and out of direct light.
- Keep this medication out of reach and sight of children.

You may wish to share this information with your family members to help them to understand your treatment options. Since every person's needs are different, it is important that you follow the advice provided to you by your own doctor, nurse and/or pharmacist and speak to them if you have any questions about this medication.

*Developed by the health care professionals of
Child & Adolescent Mental Health Program and
reviewed by the staff of the Kelty Resource Centre.*

Pimozide

©May 2013

Child & Adolescent Mental Health Program,

BC Mental Health & Addiction Services, 4500 Oak Street, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6H 3N1