

Supportive care

Clonazepam 1mg/1ml injection (Rivotril®)

Clonazepam is used to treat pain that is difficult to control. The possible benefits of treatment vary; your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist will be happy to answer any questions you have about your treatment.

We may be recommending this medicine to be used for a condition it was not originally designed for, so you may find that there are some differences between the hospital and the manufacturer's information. This leaflet will inform you of the reason(s) why you are taking this medicine and to highlight any other information. This should be read in conjunction with the manufacturer's patient information leaflet.

What is clonazepam?

Clonazepam belongs to a group of medicines called benzodiazepines, and is usually used to treat epilepsy.

There is evidence that clonazepam is a safe and effective for the treatment of symptoms other than those specified by the medicine's manufacturer and there is now plenty of experience to confirm such use. In palliative/supportive care, clonazepam is sometimes prescribed for the relief of the painful sensations caused by nerve pressure. Doctors call this 'neuropathic pain'. Clonazepam may also be used to treat symptoms of restlessness and agitation.

How does clonazepam work?

The way clonazepam works is unknown, but it is believed to act by increasing the activity of a chemical in the nervous system that is important in blocking persistent pain. This reduces the amplification of the messages sent to the brain that tell you that you are in a lot of pain.

When is clonazepam prescribed?

Clonazepam is usually prescribed when other painkillers have not worked. It may be prescribed by itself, or in combination with other painkillers. It is always prescribed by a doctor or nurse who specialises in treating pain and other symptoms of advanced cancer.

How is clonazepam given?

Clonazepam may be given as an injection if you have difficulty swallowing, or are unable to absorb oral capsules and tablets. It may also be considered where a continuous dose of clonazepam is required to manage your pain.

Clonazepam is a long-acting drug and it is possible to give as a single daily dose by injection under the skin, or in a portable battery operated pump (syringe driver) as an infusion given over 24 hours.



Clonazepam may be given alone in a syringe pump, or in combination with other medicines. A district nurse will attend your home daily to administer your medication, and this will be arranged before you leave the hospital.

Often the injection is given for a short period of time until your symptoms are under control. There may be the option to switch to tablets if it is felt you will receive benefit from them. If you do not tolerate treatment, or do not feel you are receiving any benefit, your specialist should review and discuss stopping the treatment with you.

What dose of clonazepam is usually prescribed?

Clonazepam is usually started at a low dose and then increased gradually. This is because like any medicine, clonazepam has a number of side-effects. Starting off with a low dose and slowly increasing it allows your body to get used to these effects. It also allows your doctor to see how well your symptoms are responding to clonazepam. How much clonazepam you will need depends upon how well it is working for you and if you are having any side-effects.

How well or quickly does clonazepam work?

For some people clonazepam can work very quickly (within a few hours). For other people it may take a few days of taking reasonable doses before their pain improves. Some patients do not find clonazepam to be helpful. It is not possible to tell who will respond to clonazepam.

Who cannot take clonazepam?

Normally you should not take clonazepam if you have any of the following:

- allergy or sensitivity to benzodiazepines or any of the ingredients in this medicine
- severe lung disease
- severe liver impairment
- sleep apnoea syndrome
- myasthenia gravis

Please talk to your doctor or specialist nurse if any of these apply to you.

What are the possible risks/side effects?

The most common side effects of clonazepam are drowsiness and dizziness. You may also feel weak, tired or lightheaded. Often these side effects are dose-related, so you will usually be started on a low dose. This may then be increased if tolerated.

Please read the manufacturer's patient information leaflet for a full list of side effects. If you are concerned about any side effects please talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Can I take other medicines if I'm prescribed clonazepam?

Clonazepam may interact with other medicines. Before you are discharged from hospital, or the outpatient clinic, your medicines will be reviewed by your specialist doctor or nurse, and pharmacy team.

Particular care should be taken if you are taking other sedative medicines, as the sedative effect will be increased.

Avoid excessive amounts of grapefruit juice as it may increase the effects of clonazepam.

Further information is available in the manufacturer's patient information leaflet which is supplied with the medication. Before you take or buy any new medicines, always tell your doctor or pharmacist that you are prescribed clonazepam.

Do I need to have any tests or special monitoring when taking clonazepam?

There are no routine tests required whilst you are taking clonazepam. However, the skin around the injection site will be closely monitored by the nursing team for signs of irritation.

What is the plan for follow up?

Follow up will vary from patient to patient. The supportive care or pain team will manage your initial clonazepam prescription, and ongoing prescribing once an effective dose is established. We will share the plan for the prescribing and follow up of clonazepam with the appropriate practitioners (e.g. GPs, community Macmillan nurses). You may be reviewed in the supportive care or pain clinic on a regular basis to ensure clonazepam is still the right treatment for you.

If you are unable to attend The Christie, we will liaise with the local palliative care team or GP to take over clonazepam prescribing. You will be given a supply of clonazepam injections at discharge. The amount you are given will depend on when you are next due to be reviewed by the supportive care team, or your local community team.

What is the length of treatment?

The length of treatment will depend on why you are taking clonazepam and how well it works. You will be reviewed periodically to assess whether your clonazepam can be reduced or discontinued. It may be necessary for your doctor or specialist nurse to change the dose during treatment. You can take clonazepam for as long as it helps your pain if you are not having any side effects.

Can I become dependent on clonazepam?

Clonazepam can lead to the development of dependence. This means that your body becomes dependent on the medicine. If you are concerned about this, you should discuss it with your doctor.

How do I get further prescriptions for clonazepam?

Clonazepam injection is a specialist medicine and is not readily available from your community pharmacy. If your GP or community team is willing to prescribe clonazepam, please don't leave it too late to request a prescription. You should request a prescription at least a week in advance to give your GP and community pharmacist time to make the arrangement.

If you are attending The Christie supportive care or pain clinic for follow up, clonazepam injection may be dispensed by The Christie Pharmacy. You should be given sufficient supply to last you until your next appointment.

Clonazepam should not be stopped suddenly, as this can cause unpleasant withdrawal effects, and may make your pain worsen.

If you run out of clonazepam injection and are unable to get a further supply, you must contact the supportive care team for advice on 0161 446 3559 or 0161 446 8493.

Can I drive while taking clonazepam?

Clonazepam can cause drowsiness, and impair co-ordination. You should not drive after starting clonazepam or after a dose increase until you have had a discussion with your doctor, specialist nurse, or pharmacist regarding whether this is advisable or safe. (Please see the patient information leaflet: Driving when you are taking strong painkillers).

Can I drink alcohol while taking clonazepam?

Clonazepam can make you feel sleepy, especially when you first start treatment. Do not drink alcohol while taking clonazepam. Mixing clonazepam with alcohol can be dangerous as it reduces your breathing rate, and it increases the risk of other side effects.

How should clonazepam injection be stored?

Clonazepam injection should be stored in the original dispensing container, in a cool dry place out of reach of children and pets. Any unused medication can be returned to the pharmacy for safe disposal.

Are there any other things I need to know?

The 1mg/mL injection of clonazepam is supplied with 1mL ampoules of water for injection. Your district nurse will be provided with instructions on how to administer the infusion if you have a syringe driver. You may also be given additional supplies of water for injection or sodium chloride 0.9% to dilute the clonazepam.

Who should I contact if I need urgent advice about clonazepam?

Monday to Friday, 9:00am - 5:00pm contact the supportive care team on **0161 446 3559**, or **0161 446 8493**.

During the evening or at weekends and bank holidays, if you have any queries, contact The Christie Hotline on **0161 446 3658**.

Useful contacts:

- Secretary: supportive care team **0161 446 3559**
- Secretary: pain team **0161 446 8493**
- Supportive care pharmacist **0161 446 3443**
- The Christie Pharmacy **0161 446 3432 / 3433**

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact patient.information@christie.nhs.uk

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.

Contact The Christie Hotline for
urgent support and specialist advice
The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

