PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Clarithromycin

This information from Lexicomp® explains what you need to know about this medication, including what it’s used for, how to take it, its side effects, and when to call your healthcare provider.

Brand Names: US
Biaxin [DSC]

Brand Names: Canada
ACT Clarithromycin XL; APO-Clarithromycin; APO-Clarithromycin XL; Biaxin; Biaxin XL; DOM-Clarithromycin; GEN-Clarithromycin; M-Clarithromycin; MYLAN-Clarithromycin [DSC]; PMS-Clarithromycin; RAN-Clarithromycin; RIVA-Clarithromycin; SANDOZ Clarithromycin; TARO-Clarithromycin; TEVA-Clarithromycin

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat bacterial infections.
- It is used to prevent an infection in people with HIV.
- It may be given to you for other reasons. Talk with the doctor.

What do I need to tell my doctor BEFORE I take this drug?

- If you have an allergy to clarithromycin or any other part of this drug.
- If you are allergic to any drugs like this one, any other drugs, foods, or other substances. Tell your doctor about the allergy and what signs you had, like rash; hives; itching; shortness of breath; wheezing; cough; swelling of face, lips, tongue, or throat; or any other signs.
- If this drug caused liver problems before.
- If you have ever had a long QT on ECG or other heartbeat that is not normal.
- If you have any of these health problems: Low magnesium levels, low potassium levels, or slow heartbeat.
- If you take any drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) that must not be taken with this drug, like certain drugs that are used for high cholesterol, migraines, or mood problems. There are many drugs that must not be taken with this drug.
- If you are taking any drugs that can cause a certain type of heartbeat that is not normal (prolonged QT interval). There are many drugs that can do this. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure.

This is not a list of all drugs or health problems that interact with this drug.

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of your drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe for you to take this drug with all of your drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug without checking with your doctor.

**What are some things I need to know or do while I take this drug?**

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Avoid driving and doing other tasks or actions that call for you to be alert until you see how this drug affects you.
- Do not use longer than you have been told. A second infection may happen.
- If you have high blood sugar (diabetes), you will need to watch your blood sugar closely.
- This drug interacts with many other drugs. The chance of side effects may be raised. This may include severe, life-threatening, or deadly side effects. Check with your doctor and pharmacist to make sure that it is safe for you to take this drug with all of your other drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins).
- This drug may cause a type of abnormal heartbeat (prolonged QT interval).
If this happens, the chance of other unsafe and sometimes deadly abnormal heartbeats may be raised. Talk with the doctor.

- A very bad and sometimes deadly reaction has happened with this drug. Most of the time, this reaction has signs like fever, rash, or swollen glands with problems in body organs like the liver, kidney, blood, heart, muscles and joints, or lungs. Talk with the doctor.

- If you have heart disease, talk with your doctor. In one study, people with heart disease who took clarithromycin had a higher chance of death a year or more later than those who did not take clarithromycin. The cause of this was not known. Other studies have shown different results.

- Myasthenia gravis that has gotten worse has happened during treatment with this drug.

- If you are 65 or older, use this drug with care. You could have more side effects.

- This drug may cause harm to the unborn baby if you take it while you are pregnant. If you are pregnant or you get pregnant while taking this drug, call your doctor right away.

- Tell your doctor if you are breast-feeding. You will need to talk about any risks to your baby.

**What are some side effects that I need to call my doctor about right away?**

**WARNING/CAUTION:** Even though it may be rare, some people may have very bad and sometimes deadly side effects when taking a drug. Tell your doctor or get medical help right away if you have any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

**All products:**

- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking; unusual hoarseness; or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat.

- A heartbeat that does not feel normal.
• Chest pain or pressure or a fast heartbeat.
• Very bad dizziness or passing out.
• Muscle pain or weakness.
• Shortness of breath.
• Weakness on 1 side of the body, trouble speaking or thinking, change in balance, drooping on one side of the face, or blurred eyesight.
• Very bad and sometimes deadly liver problems have happened with this drug. Call your doctor right away if you have signs of liver problems like dark urine, feeling tired, not hungry, upset stomach or stomach pain, light-colored stools, throwing up, or yellow skin or eyes.
• Diarrhea is common with antibiotics. Rarely, a severe form called C diff–associated diarrhea (CDAD) may happen. Sometimes, this has led to a deadly bowel problem (colitis). CDAD may happen during or a few months after taking antibiotics. Call your doctor right away if you have stomach pain, cramps, or very loose, watery, or bloody stools. Check with your doctor before treating diarrhea.
• A very bad skin reaction (Stevens-Johnson syndrome/toxic epidermal necrolysis) may happen. It can cause very bad health problems that may not go away, and sometimes death. Get medical help right away if you have signs like red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin (with or without fever); red or irritated eyes; or sores in your mouth, throat, nose, or eyes.

Extended-release tablets:

• You may see the tablet shell in your stool. This is normal and not a cause for concern. If your health problem does not get better and you see the tablet shell in your stool, talk with your doctor.

What are some other side effects of this drug?
All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother you or do not go away:

• Belly pain.
• Change in taste.
• Upset stomach or throwing up.

• Diarrhea.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, call your doctor. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

**How is this drug best taken?**

Use this drug as ordered by your doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

**All products:**

• To gain the most benefit, do not miss doses.

• Keep taking this drug as you have been told by your doctor or other health care provider, even if you feel well.

**Extended-release tablets:**

• Take with food.

• Swallow whole. Do not chew, break, or crush.

**All other products:**

• Take with or without food. Take with food if it causes an upset stomach.

**Liquid (suspension):**

• Shake well before use.

• Measure liquid doses carefully. Use the measuring device that comes with this drug. If there is none, ask the pharmacist for a device to measure this drug.

**What do I do if I miss a dose?**

• Take a missed dose as soon as you think about it.
• If it is close to the time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your normal time.

• Do not take 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.

**How do I store and/or throw out this drug?**

**All products:**

• Store at room temperature. Do not refrigerate or freeze.

• Protect from light.

• Store in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.

• Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.

• Throw away unused or expired drugs. Do not flush down a toilet or pour down a drain unless you are told to do so. Check with your pharmacist if you have questions about the best way to throw out drugs. There may be drug take-back programs in your area.

**Liquid (suspension):**

• Throw away any part not used after 2 weeks.

**General drug facts**

• If your symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your doctor.

• Do not share your drugs with others and do not take anyone else’s drugs.

• Keep a list of all your drugs (prescription, natural products, vitamins, OTC) with you. Give this list to your doctor.

• Talk with the doctor before starting any new drug, including prescription or OTC, natural products, or vitamins.

• Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.

• If you think there has been an overdose, call your poison control center or
get medical care right away. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.

**Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer**

This information should not be used to decide whether or not to take this medicine or any other medicine. Only the healthcare provider has the knowledge and training to decide which medicines are right for a specific patient. This information does not endorse any medicine as safe, effective, or approved for treating any patient or health condition. This is only a brief summary of general information about this medicine. It does NOT include all information about the possible uses, directions, warnings, precautions, interactions, adverse effects, or risks that may apply to this medicine. This information is not specific medical advice and does not replace information you receive from the healthcare provider. You must talk with the healthcare provider for complete information about the risks and benefits of using this medicine.

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For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.