

Position Statement on Promethazine in Primary Care

This summary covers licensed indications for promethazine and factors that prescribers should consider when prescribing promethazine.

Recommendations

- Promethazine is not recommended as a treatment to manage insomnia in patients of any age^[1].
- Promethazine should not be initiated for patients to manage behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia^[2, 3] Specialist advice should be sought if symptoms cannot be managed using non-pharmacological interventions.
- Prioritise elderly patients prescribed promethazine for deprescribing.^[4]

Background

Promethazine licensed indications: Symptomatic relief of allergy such as hay fever and urticaria, Insomnia associated with urticaria and pruritus, sedation (short-term use), nausea, vomiting, vertigo, labyrinthine disorders and motion sickness.

Anticholinergic Burden (ACB)/ Anticholinergic effects on Cognition (AEC) Promethazine has a high ACB / AEC score of 3^[5, 6]. A score of 3+ is associated with an increased cognitive impairment and mortality. Anticholinergic side effects include confusion, dizziness and falls, so avoid in the elderly.

Insomnia Promethazine is not recommended as a treatment for insomnia by NICE in their Clinical Knowledge Summaries (May 2022)^[1] and it is classed as less suitable for prescribing for sedation in the BNF. Consider non-medication strategies to support sleep: [Sleeping problems self help guide](#) Promethazine has a half-life of 10 to 15 hours; with hangover effects for 2 to 4 days after dosing.⁸

Non-cognitive symptoms of dementia NICE does not recommend the use of sedatives for the treatment of non-cognitive symptoms of dementia.^[4] Promethazine may be recommended by secondary care as a last resort for short term use. These patients require regular review^[7,2].

Promethazine is a drug of abuse which potentiates the 'high' from opioids; it is often combined with codeine from purchased cough/cold medicines & alcohol/fizzy drinks to make 'lean / purple drank'⁹

Increase in rates of prescribing and cost HWE ICB 22/23

Prescribing rates of promethazine in primary care have increased by 12% over the last 12 months. There is significant variation in prescribing rates between practices. The annual local cost of promethazine products has risen 5-fold to £1.13M in 22/23.

Preparation	Brand	Cost June 2023 Drug Tariff	Cost/tablet
Promethazine hydrochloride 25mg tablets		£26.79 for 56 tablets	48p
Promethazine hydrochloride 10mg tablets		£31.22 for 56 tablets	56p
*Promethazine hydrochloride 20mg tablets (Sominex®)		£2.69 for 16	17p
**Promethazine teoclate 25mg tablets	Avomine®	£4.23 for 28	15p
Promethazine 5mg/5ml solution	Phenergan Elixir®	£3.28 for 100ml	

*Licensed for temporary use as a night-time sleep aid

**Licensed to prevent and treat motion sickness in adults and children ≥5 years old

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References

- [1] National institution of clinical excellence (2022). CKS Insomnia. Accessed online; June 2023 at <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/insomnia/>
- [2] Banerjee- S A report for the Minister of State for Care Services on use of antipsychotic medication for people with dementia https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20130104165557/http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_108303 <accessed 12/9/23>
- [3] Summary Product Characteristic (2022) *SPC Promethazine 25mg*. Accessed online; June 2023 at <https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/5588/smpc>
- [4] National institution of clinical excellence (2018). *Dementia: assessment, management and support for people living with dementia and their carers [NG97]*. Accessed online; June 2023 at <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng97/chapter/Recommendations#managing-non-cognitive-symptoms>
- [5] Anticholinergic burden calculator (2023). Accessed Online; June 2023 at <https://www.acbcalc.com/>
- [6] South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (2023). *Medicheck*. Accessed online; June 2023 at <https://medicheck.com/>
- [7] Hertfordshire Partnership Foundation Trust (2020). *Guidelines for the Pharmacological Management of Dementia*. Accessed online; June 2023 at <https://www.hpft.nhs.uk/media/5079/guidelines-pharmacological-management-of-dementia-220920.pdf>
- [8] <https://www.drugs.com/medical-answers/how-long-does-promethazine-stay-in-your-system-364597/> <accessed 11/9/23>
- [9] Miuli et al. "Purple Drank" (Codeine and Promethazine Cough Syrup): A Systematic Review of a Social Phenomenon with Medical Implications <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32748711/> <accessed 11/9/23>

Useful Resources

- [A] Prescqipp (2023). *IMPACT: Improving medicines and polypharmacy appropriateness clinical tool 3(268i)*. Accessed online; June 2023 <https://www.prescqipp.info/umbraco/surface/authorisedmediasurface/index?url=%2fmedia%2f6587%2f268i-impact-30.pdf>
- [B] Alzheimer’s Society (2011). *Optimising treatment and care for people with behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia*. Accessed online; June 2023 <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/201808/Optimising%20treatment%20and%20care%20-%20best%20practice%20guide.pdf?downloadID=609>

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