

Anticholinergics (for Overactive Bladder)

WARWIKI

Patient Information · Pills that calm a bladder that squeezes too soon

Anticholinergics (also called antimuscarinics) are pills that calm an **overactive bladder**, reducing the sudden urges, frequent trips, and urge leakage. Common ones are **oxybutynin, tolterodine, solifenacin, fesoterodine, darifenacin, and trospium** (oxybutynin also comes as a patch or gel). They are a long-used, effective option.

How It Works

They **block the signals** that make the bladder muscle squeeze, so it contracts less often and less suddenly during filling. The result is less urgency and fewer trips. They treat the symptoms while you take them; benefit builds over a few weeks.

What to Expect

- Improvement usually over **a few weeks** — give it time before judging.
- Taken **once daily** in most extended-release forms.
- **Extended-release pills, the patch, or gel** tend to cause less dry mouth than short-acting oxybutynin.

LEARN THE TERMS

Overactive bladder (OAB)

Urgency and frequent urination from the bladder squeezing too soon.

Anticholinergic / antimuscarinic

The class of pills that calm the bladder muscle.

Dry mouth

The most common side effect.

Anticholinergic burden

The added effect of several such medicines — relevant in older adults.

Beta-3 agonist

A different OAB pill with fewer of these effects (an alternative).

Narrow-angle glaucoma

An eye condition in which these pills are usually avoided.

A NOTE FOR OLDER ADULTS In older adults, these medicines can affect **memory and thinking**, and long-term use of several anticholinergic drugs together has been linked to cognitive concerns. If this is a worry, a **beta-3 agonist** is an alternative OAB pill without that effect — ask your team.

How to Take It

- Take **once daily** as directed; don't stop early just because urgency hasn't fully settled.
- If dry mouth bothers you, ask about an **extended-release form, the patch, or gel**.
- Pair it with bladder training and pelvic-floor exercises for the best result.

Important Safety

- Usually **avoided in untreated narrow-angle glaucoma** — tell your team about eye conditions.
- Use caution if you have **trouble emptying the bladder**, significant constipation, or certain stomach conditions.
- They can reduce sweating — take care in **hot weather** to avoid overheating.

Common Side Effects

- **Dry mouth and constipation** (most common)
- Blurred vision, dry eyes
- Drowsiness; in older adults, confusion

Call your team if you have:

- You **cannot urinate** or feel you're not emptying
- **New confusion or memory problems**, especially if older
- Severe constipation, or **eye pain/redness with blurred vision**

THREE THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. Anticholinergics calm an overactive bladder, easing urgency, frequency, and urge leakage; give them a few weeks.
2. Dry mouth and constipation are common — extended-release forms, the patch, or gel help.
3. In older adults they can affect thinking; a beta-3 agonist is an alternative. Call if you can't urinate or get new confusion.