



Alpha Agonists for the Treatment of Glaucoma

While there is no cure for glaucoma, it can be controlled.

Elevated intraocular pressure (IOP) may damage the optic nerve, which can lead to vision loss. Treatment for glaucoma focuses on lowering the IOP to a level that is less likely to cause further optic nerve damage. This is known as the “target pressure” or “goal pressure.” The target pressure differs from individual to individual. Your target pressure may change during your course of treatment.

If you have glaucoma, an eye drop may be prescribed to lower your eye pressure. There are many more choices for topical treatment (eye drops) today than there were only a few years ago. I have chosen an **alpha agonist** medication to treat your glaucoma.

How Do Alpha Agonists Work?

Alpha agonist medications are reliable for lowering the intraocular pressure. They work by decreasing the production of the fluid that the eye continually makes, called the *aqueous humor*. This class of medications is usually taken twice a day. Exactly every 12 hours is not necessary. One drop in the morning and then again in the evening is okay.

What Are the Alpha Agonists?

There are two alpha agonist drugs:

- Apraclonidine (Iopidine®) rarely used for routine glaucoma treatment
- Brimonidine (Alphagan® and Alphagan P®)



Generics are available for Alphagan but not Alphagan P. The development of red eye problems are more likely with the generics.

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Possible Side Effects of Alpha Agonists

All medications, including eyedrops, have not only benefits but may also have side effects. Some people taking alpha agonist eyedrops may experience:

- Dry mouth
- Ocular allergy with a red eye and/or red eyelids(less common with Alphagan P)
- Headache, fatigue, irritability or sleep disorder
- Low or high blood pressure and possible slowing of heart rate (less than with beta blockers)
- Joint aches
- Upset stomach, nausea or constipation
- Contraindicated if taking Monoamine oxidase inhibitors i.e.
 - Marplan(isocarboxazid)
 - Parnate(tranlycypromine)
 - Emsam/Zelapar/Eldepryl(all forms of selegiline)
 - Nardil(phenelzine)

For glaucoma medications to work, you must take them regularly and continuously as prescribed by your doctor.

Medication Tips

Most importantly you must take your medications on a regular basis. They are easy to forget. Systemic complications from eye drops are rare. Although not mandatory, one can decrease these risks as follows. After putting in eye drops, blot away any excess drops with a tissue. Close your eyes for three minutes without blinking, then resume normal activities. Feel free to call Dr. Beck's office to report any concerns.