

Muscle Relaxants: What You Should Know

What are muscle relaxants?

Muscle relaxants are prescription drugs. They are used to treat painful muscle spasms—such as a headache, stiff neck, or backache.

There is little evidence that these drugs really help relieve pain and stiffness. And they have some serious side effects:

- They cause sedation—they make you relaxed and sleepy. Many experts think this is what actually helps people. But it can also cause dangerous falls and accidents.
- Some of the drugs have other serious risks, including addiction and liver damage.

Nondrug and over-the-counter (OTC) treatments may work as well.

Muscle spasms often get better with nondrug treatments, such as:

- A heating pad
- Exercise or yoga
- Biofeedback
- Progressive relaxation
- Massage

If nondrug treatments don't help, try over-the-counter (OTC) pain relievers, such as:

- Acetaminophen (Tylenol and generics)
- Ibuprofen (Advil and generics)
- Naproxen (Aleve and generics)

The OTC drugs work as well as muscle relaxants. But they cause much less sedation.

When do muscle relaxants make sense?

Sometimes, muscle relaxants may be a good short-term choice. They may make sense if:

- You can't take *acetaminophen* because you have a condition like liver disease. But if you have liver disease, you shouldn't take chlorzoxazone, metaxalone, methocarbamol, or orphenadrine.
- You can't take *ibuprofen* or *naproxen* because you have had bleeding ulcers, heart problems, or kidney problems.
- The pain from your muscle spasm is making it difficult to sleep, so the sedation might be helpful to you.

Who should avoid muscle relaxants?

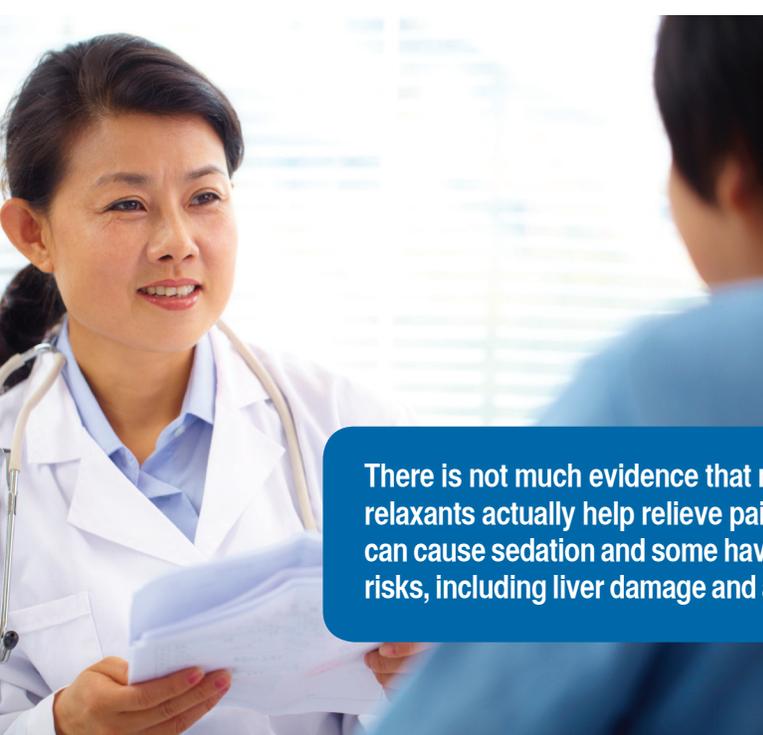
The drugs are not recommended for:

- People age 65 or older—the drugs may cause accidents or falls.
- Pilots, drivers, and people who operate machines—the sedation can be dangerous.
- People with liver or kidney disease, heart issues, or glaucoma—the drugs can cause further damage.

Our advice:

We haven't chosen any muscle relaxant as a *Best Buy* drug. There is little research to show that the drugs are effective. Also, they have serious risks, especially for older people. We recommend:

- If you suffer from a painful muscle spasm, try nondrug or OTC treatments first.
- If you decide to try a muscle relaxant, don't take it longer than three weeks.
- Avoid *carisoprodol* (Soma). It has a much higher risk of abuse and addiction, compared with other muscle relaxants.



There is not much evidence that muscle relaxants actually help relieve pain. They can cause sedation and some have serious risks, including liver damage and addiction.

Muscle Relaxants: Key Points

Our analysis is based on a scientific review by the Oregon Health and Science University Drug Effectiveness Review Project. This is a summary of a longer, more detailed report you can find at www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org.

Generic Name	Brand Name	Comments/Special notes
Cyclobenzaprine	Flexeril	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The 5 mg dose has fewer side effects and is as effective as the 10 mg dose.• Should not be used by people with heart disease, arrhythmias, or glaucoma.
Cyclobenzaprine (No generic available)	Amrix	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is a sustained-release version of the drug above. It is convenient because you can take it just once-a-day. But it has not been shown to be more effective than standard-release cyclobenzaprine.
Carisoprodol	Soma	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid using because it is associated with a high risk of abuse and addiction.• In the body, it changes to meprobamate, a drug listed as a controlled substance because it can lead to abuse and addiction.
Chlorzoxazone	Lorzone	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rare cases of liver toxicity (damage).• May cause red-orange urine, but this is not harmful.
Metaxalone	Skelaxin	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Should not be used by people with liver damage or kidney disease.
Methocarbamol	Robaxin, Robaxin-750	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May cause black, blue, or green urine, but this is not harmful.• Should not be used by people with liver disease.
Orphenadrine	Generic only	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Should not be used by people with liver disease, heart disease, arrhythmias, or glaucoma.