

Comprehensive Overview of Pruritus Management: Emphasis on Hydroxyzine and Its Function in Relieving Itching

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Abstract

Pruritus, commonly known as itching, is an uncomfortable sensation that triggers a strong urge to scratch, profoundly impacting patients' quality of life. Its prevalence increases with age and is associated with various conditions, imposing a significant health-care burden. Pruritus can lead to sleep disturbances and anxiety. Histamine is a main cause of itch, though interleukins also contribute to its development. Antihistamines like hydroxyzine are commonly used for relief. Hydroxyzine, a first-generation antihistamine, blocks H1 receptors, reducing histamine release, and offering sedative and anxiolytic effects. Hydroxyzine is recommended as a first-line treatment option for chronic itching, and due to its diverse benefits, it is a valuable tool in managing this challenging symptom. This comprehensive review provides insights into pruritus and its management, with a specific focus on the role of hydroxyzine. Hydroxyzine with its sustained release formulation demands more focus. Expert opinions are also included to enrich the understanding of treating patients experiencing itching.

Key words: Histamine, Hydroxyzin, Interleukins, Pruritus, Quality of life

INTRODUCTION

Pruritus, often known as itching, is an unpleasant sensory sensation that creates an intense desire to scratch and has a significant influence on patients' quality of life (QOL), subsequently resulting in several problems related to sleep, attention, anxiety, and sexual and social function.^[1] In adults, the prevalence of chronic pruritus is around 13.5% in general population, but it increases to 16.8% in cancer screening participants.^[1] Chronic itching becomes more common as people get older. The lifetime prevalence of chronic pruritus in general populations is 22%. This implies that more than one in five people experience chronic pruritus once in their life.^[1] It is a sign of numerous illnesses that have a significant

financial impact on healthcare.^[1] It is the most common symptom in dermatology and can manifest either acutely or chronically (lasting more than 6 weeks).^[1]

Itching is characterized by four types: Cutaneous, neuropathic, neurogenic, and psychogenic.^[2] Cutaneous itch is also known as pruritoceptive itch and results from irritated skin. Neurogenic itch originates centrally and is reported in patients with cholestasis.^[2] Neuropathic itch originates centrally along the afferent nerve pathway and is due to damage to the nervous system.^[2] Psychogenic itch is observed in patients with conditions like parasitophobia.^[2]

Itching leads to several problems related to sleep, anxiety, or attention.^[3] In various disorders, histamine is the main cause of pruritus. However, keratinocytes, immune cells, and cutaneous neurons interact in a variety of ways during the transmission of pruritus, which can occur in both histaminergic and non-histaminergic pathways.^[3] Hence, it is essential to obtain a thorough patient history, conduct a detailed physical examination, create a structured differential diagnosis, and carry out the necessary investigations.^[3]

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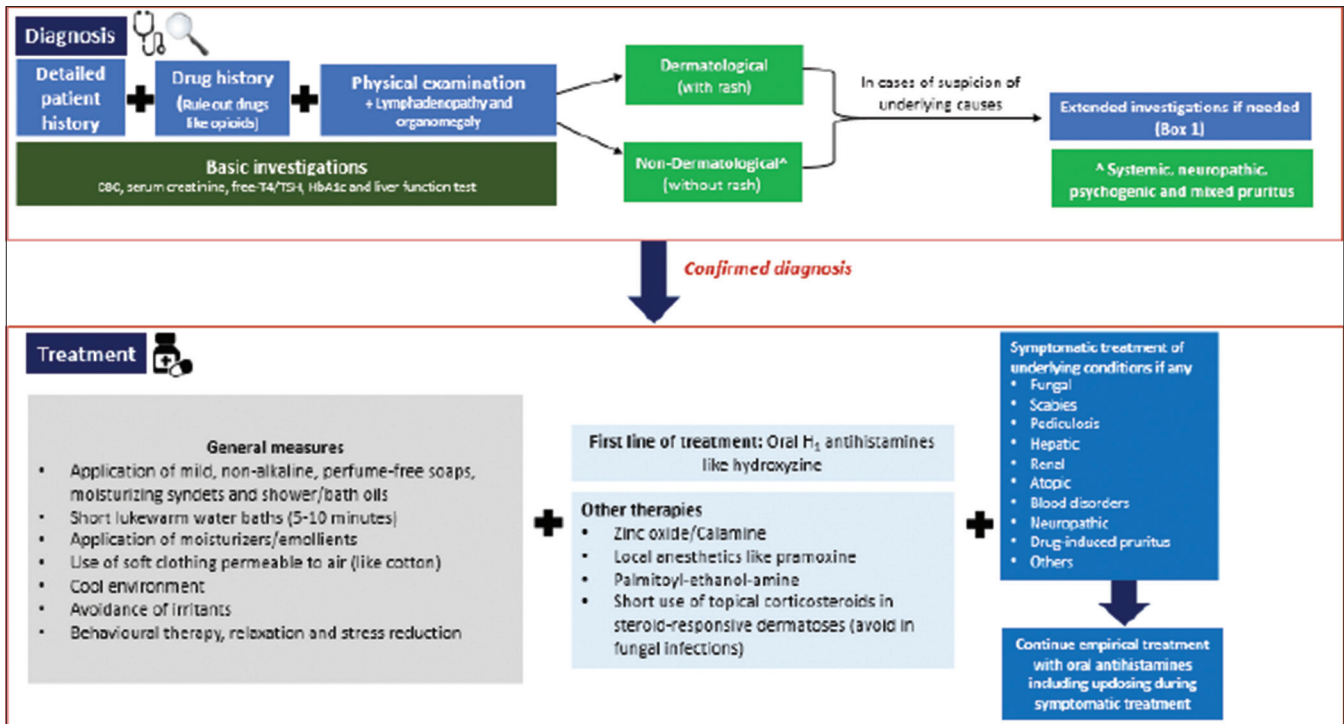


Figure 1: Algorithm for management of chronic pruritus (Adapted from: Godse *et al.*, 2021)

Figure 1 demonstrates the algorithm for accurate diagnosis and management of chronic pruritus.^[1]

Treatment includes several therapies, like antihistamines to help improve this distressing symptom.^[3] Itching caused by histamine is known as histamine-dependent itching. The stimulus is sent to the brain as itching and to the nerve endings as it works on the “sensory nerve” that experiences pain and itching. This results in the production of neuropeptides, which are a type of neurotransmitter.^[4] In recent times, interleukin (IL)-31, IL-4, and IL-13 have also been identified as various factors that cause itching in addition to the well-known histamine.^[4] It has been demonstrated that although IL-4 and IL-13 cause persistent itch by acting on sensory nerves and lowering the response threshold to pruritogenic stimuli, IL-31 induces acute itch by acting on IL-31RA in sensory nerves.^[4] Histamine is not the only substance that can induce itching; but currently, we do not know the extent to which these factors are involved in each disease.^[4] Antihistamines are still commonly used as treatments for itch and are frequently beneficial, despite the fact that the extent of involvement may differ from person to person.^[4] This suggests that histamine is implicated, to a greater or lesser extent in itchy diseases.^[4,5]

EFFICACY OF HYDROXYZINE IN THE TREATMENT OF CHRONIC PRURITUS

Thomas *et al.*^[1] evaluated the effectiveness of hydroxyzine hydrochloride in individuals with chronic pruritus ($n = 400$).

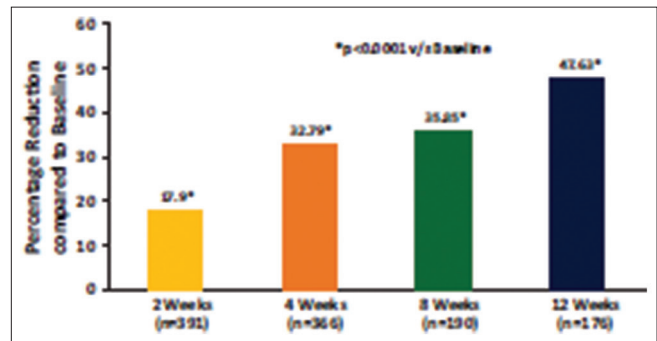


Figure 2: Percentage reduction in 5-D itch scores compared with baseline

This study found that after 12 weeks of treatment, hydroxyzine hydrochloride significantly improved patients’ QOL ($P < 0.0001$) and their pruritus condition ($P < 0.0001$) and was well tolerated in patients with chronic pruritus, as shown in Figure 2.

Shohrati *et al.*^[6] examined the efficacy and safety of cetirizine, doxepin, and hydroxyzine in the treatment of chronic pruritus caused by sulfur mustard. This 4-week, randomized, and double-blind trial involved 75 participants. All the study subjects received either cetirizine (10 mg), doxepin (10 mg), or hydroxyzine (25 mg/day) for 4 weeks. For the cetirizine, doxepin, and hydroxyzine groups, the corresponding mean pre-treatment pruritic scores were 38.2 ± 4.8 , 37.2 ± 4.9 , and 37.3 ± 5.1 . Following treatment, the average pruritic

ratings were 24.8 ± 3.1 , 17.8 ± 2.5 , and 16.7 ± 2.3 , respectively, in the cetirizine, doxepin, and hydroxyzine groups.^[6]

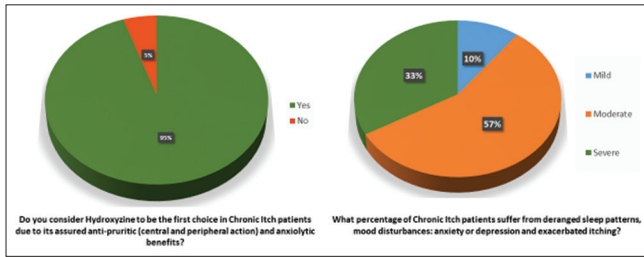


Figure 3: Expert opinion on chronic itch and use of hydroxyzine for its treatment

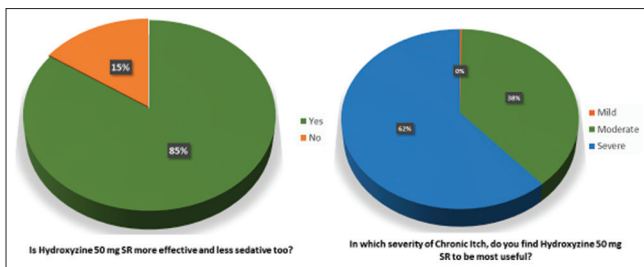


Figure 4: Summary of expert opinion on hydroxyzine's sedative effects and impact on itch severity

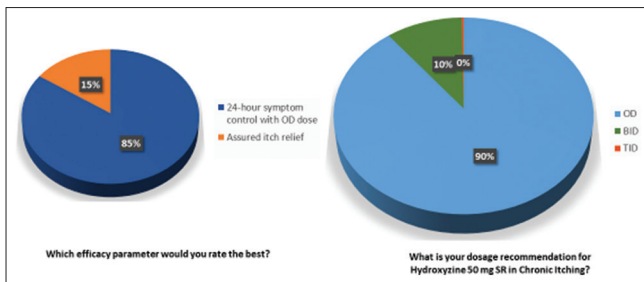


Figure 5: Recommendation and efficacy of hydroxyzine 50 mg

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, pruritus or itching is a distressing sensory experience that can significantly impact patients' QOL. Hydroxyzine, a first-generation antihistamine, effectively alleviates pruritus by blocking H1 receptors and reducing histamine release from mast cells. Hydroxyzine's efficacy is supported by studies showing significant improvement in pruritus and QOL, making it a recommended first-line treatment for chronic itching. Its multifaceted benefits, including anxiolytic and sedative effects, contribute to its clinical significance in managing this challenging symptom.

EXPERT OPINION

Itching or pruritus is a painful sensory sensation that can have a major influence on patients' QOL. Hydroxyzine, a first-generation antihistamine, efficiently relieves itch by inhibiting H1 receptors and lowering mast cell histamine production. Hydroxyzine's efficacy is validated by studies that indicate considerable improvement in pruritus and QOL, making it a first-line therapy option for chronic itching. Its numerous benefits, which include anxiolytic and sedative actions, contribute to its clinical significance in the treatment of this difficult symptom. Figures 3-6 summarize the opinion of the experts on the recommendation, efficacy, and use of hydroxyzine in patients with severe itch.

1. Ravichandran G

MD DD, Apollo Hospitals Group, Chennai, Tamil Nadu

In patients with chronic itch, sleep patterns, and mood disturbances, such as anxiety or depression, can have a moderately debilitating impact. I usually prefer Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR for chronic itch as a once-daily

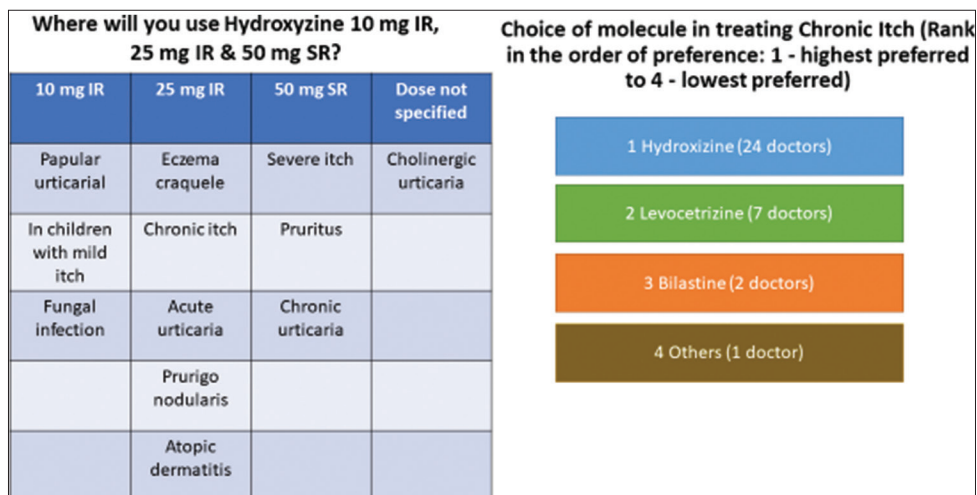


Figure 6: Ranking as per expert opinion

(OD) dosage. The current treatment approach I prefer for my patients with chronic itch involves combining two different antihistamines. It has 24-h symptom control with an OD dose and is preferred for chronic itch.

2. Dr Vivek Pande
MBBS, DDV, Skin Care Clinic, Nagpur, Maharashtra

In patients with chronic itch, sleep patterns, and mood disturbances, such as anxiety or depression, can have a moderately debilitating impact. I prescribe Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR for chronic itching. The current treatment for chronic itch involves combining two different antihistamines. I noticed 24-h symptom control with an OD dose, which is preferred in acute and chronic itch conditions.

3. Dr Mahaveer Gupta
M.B.B.S, D.D.V, Mahaveer Skin and Allergic Clinic, Jaipur, Rajasthan

In patients dealing with chronic itch, sleep patterns, and mood disturbances, such as anxiety or depression, can have a moderately debilitating impact. The recommended dosage regimen for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching is OD. For patients visiting my clinic, with chronic itch, I prefer up-dosing of the same antihistamines. It has 24-h symptom control with an OD dose and is preferred in chronic itch conditions.

4. Dr. Dilip Thakkar
MD Skin, Clinic, Mumbai, Maharashtra

I prefer to recommend the dosage of Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching as OD. The current treatment for chronic itch involves the combination of two different antihistamines. I noticed patients have 24-h symptom control with the OD dose, which is preferred in acute and chronic itch conditions.

5. Mr. Kailash Chandra Khatri
MD Skin and VD, Govt Medical College Barmer, Barmer, Rajasthan

The recommended dosage for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching is OD. In current settings, chronic itch is treated with a combination of two different antihistamines. It is less sedative, has 24-h symptom control with a OD dose, and is preferred in chronic itch conditions.

6. Ashish Sonariker
MD Skin DDV, Mansarovar Arcade, New Osmanpura, Aurangabad, Maharashtra

I recommend Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itch. The current treatment for chronic itch

involves the combination of two different antihistamines. I observed an improvement in 24-h symptom control with an OD dose, which is preferred in chronic itch conditions.

7. Dr. Ashok Dhakad
MBBS MD Skin, City Skin Clinic, Mandsaur, Madhya Pradesh

The recommended dosage for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching is OD. I personally prefer the up-dosing of the same antihistamines in patients. It has 24-h symptom control with an OD dose and is preferred in acute and chronic itch conditions.

8. Dr. Ashok Gangwar
MBBS, DVD, Gangwar Skin and Hair Clinic, Raipur, Chhattisgarh

I have noticed that in patients dealing with chronic itch, sleep patterns, and mood disturbances, such as anxiety or depression, this can have a severe impact. I prescribe Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching twice daily (BD). It has 24-h symptom control and is preferred for acute and chronic itch conditions.

9. Saurabh Garg
MD, Ankit Clinic, Purnea, Bihar

In patients dealing with chronic itch, sleep patterns, and mood disturbances, such as anxiety or depression, can have a mild impact. The recommended dosage for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching is OD. In patients with chronic itch, I prefer the combination of two different antihistamines. It has 24-h symptom control with an OD dose and is preferred in acute and chronic itch conditions.

10. Dr. Vishalakshi Viswanath
MD, DNB, DDV, Rajiv Gandhi Medical College, Disha Skin and Laser Institute, Thane, Maharashtra

The recommended dosage for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching is once OD. The current treatment for chronic itch involves a combination of two different antihistamines. I have noticed that it provides assured itch relief and is preferred for chronic itch conditions.

11. Dr. Pankaj Tiwary
MD, Patna Skin Hair Clinic, Patna, Bihar

In the case of persistent itching, Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR (OD) is advised. At present, two different antihistamines are combined to treat chronic itching. Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR is preferred for chronic itch diseases since it has 24-h symptom management with an OD dose.

12. Imran Majid

MD, FRCP, Cutis Institute of Dermatology, Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir

In the case of chronic itching, the recommended dose of Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR is OD. At present, two different antihistamines are combined to treat chronic itching. I prefer them for both acute and chronic itch disorders because they have 24-h symptom control with an OD dose.

13. Dr. Dinesh Hawelia

MD, Kolkata, West Bengal

The recommended dosage for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching is OD. The current treatment for chronic itch involves up-dosing of the same antihistamines. It has 24-h symptom control with an OD dose and is preferred in chronic itch conditions.

14. Dr. Pradeep Kumar

MD (Skin and VD), Skin Care Centre, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh

I recommend Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR (BD) for chronic itch. In my opinion, the current management of chronic itch involves up-dosing on the same antihistamines. It has assured itch relief and is preferred for acute and chronic itch conditions.

15. Bellapu Srinath

MBBS DDV, Sri Ratnaji Skin, Sex and Physiotherapy Hospital, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh

The recommended dose for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching is OD. The current management for chronic itch involves up-dosing of the same antihistamines. Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR is less sedative, has 24-h symptom control for itch relief and I prefer it for chronic itch conditions.

16. Dr. Siddhartha Chakraborty

MBBS, DTM and H, MD, Kolkata, West Bengal

The recommended dosage for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in patients with chronic itch is OD. The current therapy aligns with the current approach to addressing chronic itch, which involves up-dosing of the same antihistamines. It is less sedative, has 24-h symptom control for itch relief, and is preferred for acute and chronic itch.

17. Sarita Kalwaniya

Dermatologist, Kuchaman Imaging and Dermatology Clinic, Kuchaman City, Rajasthan

In the case of persistent itching, Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR (OD) is advised. At present, two different antihistamines

are combined to treat chronic itching. In both acute and chronic itch disorders, Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR is preferable since it is more efficient and provides 24-h symptom control.

18. Arun Kumar Chatterjee

MBBS, DVD, PGC (H and FW Management), Skin Care Centre, Delhi

The recommended dosage for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching is OD. The current management for chronic itch comprises the up-dosing of the same antihistamines. It is more effective, has 24-h symptom control, and I prefer it for both acute and chronic itch conditions.

19. Milind Deshmukh

MBBS., MD (Dermatology), First Floor, Behind Nehru Garden, Near Hotel Pathik, Shalimar, Nashik

I personally recommend Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR (OD) in the context of chronic itching. The present treatment approach for chronic itch involves the up-dosing of the same antihistamines. It is more effective, has 24-h symptom control, and is preferred in both acute and chronic itch conditions.

20. Sourav Kundu

MD (Dermatology), Podder Medical, Kolkata, West Bengal

In the case of persistent itching, Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR (OD) is advised. Increasing the dosage of the same antihistamines is the current approach to treat chronic itch. In persistent itch situations, Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR is preferable since it is more efficient and provides 24-h symptom control.

21. Dr Pradyumna Vaidya

MBBS, DVD, DNB, Private Clinic, Pune, Maharashtra

The recommended dosage for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching is OD. The current treatment approach for chronic itch involves the combination of two different antihistamines. It is more effective, has 24-h symptom control, and is preferred in chronic itch conditions.

22. Pradip Kumar Sahana

DVD, MD (DERM and VEN), Bardhaman, West Bengal

In the case of chronic itching, the recommended dose of Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR is OD. In my opinion, patients

with chronic itch should be treated with a combination of two different antihistamines. It is less sedative, has 24-h symptom control for itch relief, and is preferred in patients with chronic itch.

23. Dr. Nitin Tayade
MBBS DDV, Palnit Clinic, Panvel, Maharashtra

The recommended dosage for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching is OD. The current treatment for chronic itch patients involves the combination of two different antihistamines. In my opinion, it is more effective, has 24-h symptom control, and is preferred in chronic itch conditions.

24. Reena Rai
MD, Psgimsr, Coimbatore, TN

In the case of persistent itching, hydroxyzine 50 mg SR is suggested as the OD dose. At present, two different antihistamines are combined to treat chronic itching. In persistent itch situations, it is preferable since it is more efficient and provides 24-h symptom control.

25. Vimala Manne
MBBS MD DVL, Dr. Vimala's Skin, Hair and Laser Clinic, Hyderabad, Telangana

The recommended dosage for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching is OD. The current pharmacotherapy for chronic itch involves the combination of two different antihistamines. In my patients, I have noticed assured itch relief, which is ideal for acute and chronic itch conditions.

26. Dr. Vadrevu Ravi
MD, Sai Sudha Hospital, Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh

According to my opinion, the recommended dosage for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching is OD. I prefer treating chronic itch patients with the up-dosing of the same antihistamines. It is less sedative, has assured itch relief, and is preferred in chronic itch conditions.

27. Sachin Chaudhari
MD, Skin and Hair Clinic, Vasai, Maharashtra

In the context of chronic itching, the recommended dosage for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR is OD. At present, two different antihistamines are combined to treat chronic itching. In both acute and chronic itch disorders, Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR is preferable since it is more efficient and provides 24-h symptom control.

28. Dr VK Jain
MD SKIN and VD, Dr V K Jain Skin Care Center, Rohtak, Haryana

The recommended dosage for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching is OD. The current treatment for chronic itch involves the combination of two different antihistamines. It is more effective, has 24-h symptom control, and is preferred in acute and chronic itch conditions.

29. Dr David Pudukadan
MD Dermatology, Pudukadan's Derma Laser Centre, Thrissur, Kerala

For chronic itching, the advised dose of Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR is OD. Current therapy combines two antihistamines, with this option being less sedative, ensuring reliable itch relief, and preferred for both acute and chronic cases.

30. Sanjeev Aurangabadkar
MBBS MD, Dr. Aurangabadkar's Skin and Laser Clinic, Hyderabad, Telangana

In cases of chronic itching, the suggested dose for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR is OD. Current management for chronic itch involves up-dosing the same antihistamine dose, offering enhanced effectiveness with 24-h symptom management and a preference in both acute and chronic itch scenarios.

31. Dr Anjana Tandel
M.B.B.S. MD (Skin and V.D.) D.V.D, Dina Skin Care Clinic, Valsad, Gujarat

The recommended dosage for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching is OD. The current treatment for chronic itch involves the up-dosing of the same antihistamines. It is more effective, has 24-h symptom control, and is preferred in acute and chronic itch conditions.

32. Dr. Parag Talavia
M.D. skin and V.D, Dr. Parag Talavia Skin Laser and Cosmetic Clinic, Gondal, Gujarat

For chronic itching, the advised dosage of Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR is BD. The current approach to chronic itch treatment combines two different antihistamines, providing intensified efficacy, assured symptom control for itch relief, and a preferred option for managing chronic itch conditions.

33. Siddhartha Saikia
MD Dermatology, Saikia Skin Care, Gandhinagar, Gujarat

The recommended dosage for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching is OD. It is more effective,

has 24-h symptom control, and is preferred in chronic itch conditions.

34. R. Madhu

MD (Dermatology), DCH, Madras Medical College, Chennai, Tamil Nadu

I personally prefer the Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR BD dose for chronic itching. In my patients with chronic itch, I prefer the up-dosing of the same antihistamines. It is less sedative, has 24-h symptom control for itch relief, and is preferred in acute and chronic itch conditions.

35. Jayakar Thomas

MD, Chettinad Academy of Research and Education, Chennai, Tamil Nadu

The recommended dosage for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching is OD. The current treatment for chronic itch involves the up-dosing of the same antihistamines. It is less sedative, has 24-h symptom control for itch relief, and is preferred in acute and chronic itch conditions.

36. Dr Venkateshulu G

MD (Skin and STD), Adarsha Skin Care Clinic, Nelamangala, Karnataka

In the context of chronic itching, the prescribed dose for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR is OD. The current treatment for chronic itch combines two different antihistamines, offering increased effectiveness with minimized sedation, 24-h symptom control for itch relief, and being the preferred choice for acute and chronic itch situations.

37. Dr Shamanth

MBBS, DDVL, Karnataka

The recommended dosage for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching is OD. The current treatment for chronic itch involves the combination of two different antihistamines. It is more effective, has 24-h symptom control for itch relief, and is preferred in acute and chronic itch conditions.

38. Dr. Nandakumar

MBBS, MD, Sreenandanam, Vattiyodrkavu, TVPM, Trivandrum, Kerala

In the case of persistent itching, Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR is advised (OD). At present, two different antihistamines

are combined to treat chronic itching. In both acute and chronic itch disorders, it is recommended because it is more efficient, has 24-h symptom management, and provides itch relief.

39. Dr. Sudarshan R

MBBS, MD in Dermatology, Venereology, and Leprosy, Suraksha Clinic, Karnataka

The recommended dosage for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR in the context of chronic itching is OD. The current treatment for chronic itch involves the combination of two different antihistamines. It is more effective, has 24-h symptom control for itch relief, and is preferred in acute and chronic itch.

40. Dr. C Swathi

MBBS, DDVL, Ramdev Rao Hospital, Hyderabad, Telangana

In the context of chronic itching, the recommended dosing for Hydroxyzine 50 mg SR is OD. The current approach to addressing chronic itch encompasses a combination of two different antihistamines, offering increased efficacy, assured symptom management for itch-related symptoms, and being the preferred option for managing chronic itch conditions.

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