



The skeletal muscle relaxants are a diverse set of drugs used for treating muscle spasms involved in back or neck pain, headaches or fibromyalgia. They are also used to relieve the muscle spasticity, or stiff, rigid muscles with exaggerated reflexes, that can stem from cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, or stroke. These medicines should be used with caution because most of them cause sedation as a side effect, which increases the risk of car crashes, falls, and other accidents, and some of them pose a risk of serious problems, such as liver toxicity and addiction.

To help you and your doctor choose the right muscle relaxant, if you need one, Consumer Reports has evaluated the drugs in this category based on their effectiveness, safety, and cost. This 2-page brief is a summary of a 19-page report you can access on the Internet at ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs. You can also learn about other drugs we've analyzed on this free Web site.

DO YOU NEED A MUSCLE RELAXANT?

If you have a common muscle spasm condition, such as back or neck aches, headaches or fibromyalgia, you may first want to try to get relief using non-drug therapies, such as heating pads, massage, and yoga. If those don't work, common over-the-counter pain relievers work as well as muscle relaxants. These include acetaminophen (Tylenol and generic), aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil and generic), and naproxen (Aleve or generic). But if those don't bring you relief, or you can't take them for health reasons, you could consider a muscle relaxant.

Where muscle relaxants could be a good first option is the treatment of muscle spasticity associated with disorders such as cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis or stroke. Due to the seriousness of these conditions, the benefits of the drugs may be worth the potential risks and consequently, the medicines are considered first line therapy for spasticity triggered by these disorders.

Our Recommendations

Muscle spasms

If you and your doctor have decided to try a muscle relaxant to treat muscle spasms, taking all of the evidence into consideration, we chose **generic cyclobenzaprine tablets** as our Best Buy selection. Cyclobenzaprine is supported by the strongest body of evidence among the six muscle relaxants FDA approved for treating muscle spasms (see the chart below). Also, it is available in a generic form that costs \$8 to \$15 for a seven-day course, which makes it one of the least expensive generic muscle relaxants and significantly less costly than brand-name ones that can run more than \$100.

We recommend avoiding carisoprodol (Soma) because it is associated with a high risk of abuse and addiction potential not seen with other muscle relaxants.

Muscle spasticity

Three of the nine available muscle relaxants are FDA approved for treating spasticity.

Taking into consideration all of the evidence on muscle relaxants for spasticity, our Best Buy pick is **generic baclofen tablets**. Baclofen costs between \$27 and \$60 for a 30-day supply, so you could save a significant amount of money over some of the more expensive brand-name muscle relaxants, which can cost from \$200 to up to \$486 a month.

In addition to sedation, the most common side effects associated with muscle relaxants include weakness or fatigue, dizziness, and dry mouth.

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Our independent evaluations are based on scientific reviews conducted by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. Grants from the Engelberg Foundation and the National Library of Medicine help fund *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*. These materials were made possible by a grant from the state Attorney General Consumer and Prescriber Education Grant Program, which is funded by the multi-state settlement of consumer fraud claims regarding the marketing of the prescription drug Neurontin (gabapentin).

Muscle Relaxants: Overview of Evidence of Effectiveness*

Drug	Spasticity: Evidence showing benefit vs. placebo	Spasms: Evidence showing benefit vs. placebo
Baclofen	+++	Not shown to be beneficial
Dantrolene	+++	Not shown to be beneficial
Tizanidine	++	++
Carisoprodol	Not shown to be beneficial	+
Chlorzoxazone	Not shown to be beneficial	+
Cyclobenzaprine	Not shown to be beneficial	+++
Metaxalone	Not shown to be beneficial	+/-
Methocarbamol	Not shown to be beneficial	+
Orphenadrine	Not shown to be beneficial	+

*Key to chart: +++ = more than 10 randomized trials showing benefit; ++ = 5-9 randomized trials showing benefit; + = 2-4 randomized trials showing benefit; +/- = inconsistent evidence. "Not shown to be beneficial" means the drug is not FDA approved for this indication and there are only 0-2 trials showing benefit.

Muscle Relaxants Price Comparison

	Generic Name and Dose	Brand Name	Typical Dosing Schedule ¹	Approved Indication ¹	Average cost per 30 days of use (for spasticity) or per 7 days of use (for muscle spasms) ²
CR BEST BUY	Baclofen 10 mg tablet	Generic	Three times daily	Spasticity	\$27
CR BEST BUY	Baclofen 20 mg tablet	Generic	Three times daily	Spasticity	\$60
	Carisoprodol 250 mg tablet	Soma	Three times daily	Spasms	\$84
	Carisoprodol 350 mg tablet	Soma	Three times daily	Spasms	\$147
	Carisoprodol 350 mg tablet	Generic	Three times daily	Spasms	\$11
	Chlorzoxazone 500 mg tablet	Parafon Forte DSC	Three-four times daily	Spasms	\$63-\$84
	Chlorzoxazone 500 mg tablet	Generic	Three-four times daily	Spasms	\$8-\$11
	Cyclobenzaprine 5 mg tablet	Flexeril	Three times daily	Spasms	\$42
	Cyclobenzaprine 10 mg tablet	Flexeril	Three times daily	Spasms	\$42
	Cyclobenzaprine 7.5 mg	Fexmid	Three times daily	Spasms	\$105
CR BEST BUY	Cyclobenzaprine 5 mg	Generic	Three times daily	Spasms	\$15
CR BEST BUY	Cyclobenzaprine 10 mg	Generic	Three times daily	Spasms	\$8
	Cyclobenzaprine 15 mg continuous delivery capsule	Amrix	Once daily	Spasms	\$91
	Cyclobenzaprine 30 mg continuous delivery capsule	Amrix	Once daily	Spasms	\$91
	Dantrolene 25 mg capsule	Dantrium	Three-four times daily	Spasticity	\$138-\$184
	Dantrolene 50 mg capsule	Dantrium	Three-four times daily	Spasticity	\$165-\$220
	Dantrolene 100 mg capsule	Dantrium	Three-four times daily	Spasticity	\$231-\$308
	Dantrolene 25 mg capsule	Generic	Three-four times daily	Spasticity	\$111-\$148
	Dantrolene 50 mg capsule	Generic	Three-four times daily	Spasticity	\$153-\$204
	Dantrolene 100 mg capsule	Generic	Three-four times daily	Spasticity	\$198-\$264
	Metaxalone 400 mg tablet	Skelaxin	Three times daily	Spasms	\$42
	Metaxalone 800 mg tablet	Skelaxin	Three times daily	Spasms	\$105
	Methocarbamol 500 mg tablet	Robaxin	Four times daily	Spasms	\$56
	Methocarbamol 750 mg tablet	Robaxin-750	Four times daily	Spasms	\$56
	Methocarbamol 500 mg tablet	Generic	Four times daily	Spasms	\$11
	Methocarbamol 750 mg tablet	Generic	Four times daily	Spasms	\$14
	Orphenadrine 100 mg tablet	Norflex	Twice daily	Spasms	\$42
	Orphenadrine 100 mg tablet	Generic	Twice daily	Spasms	\$28
	Tizanidine 2 mg tablet	Zanaflex	Three times daily	Spasticity	\$195
	Tizanidine 4 mg tablet	Zanaflex	Three times daily	Spasticity	\$249
	Tizanidine 2 mg capsule	Zanaflex	Three times daily	Spasticity	\$249
	Tizanidine 4 mg capsule	Zanaflex	Three times daily	Spasticity	\$324
	Tizanidine 6 mg capsule	Zanaflex	Three times daily	Spasticity	\$486
	Tizanidine 2 mg tablet	Generic	Three times daily	Spasticity	\$81
	Tizanidine 4 mg tablet	Generic	Three times daily	Spasticity	\$72
	Carisoprodol/aspirin 200/ 325 mg tablet	Carisoprodol CPD	Three times daily	Spasms	\$42
	Carisoprodol/aspirin/codeine 200/325/16 mg tablet	Carisoprodol CPD with codeine	Three times daily	Spasms	\$42
	Methocarbamol/aspirin 400/325 mg tablet	Generic	Three times daily	Spasms	\$13
	Orphenadrine/aspirin/caffeine 50/770/60 mg tablet	Norgesic forte	Three times daily	Spasms	\$63
	Orphenadrine/aspirin/caffeine 25/385/30 mg tablet	Orphenadrine compound	Three times daily	Spasms	\$42
	Orphenadrine/aspirin/caffeine 50/770/60 mg tablet	Orphenadrine compound	Three times daily	Spasms	\$63-\$84
	Orphenadrine/aspirin/caffeine 25/385/30 mg tablet	Orphengesic	Three times daily	Spasms	\$21

1. As typically prescribed. The dose ranges and the drug's FDA approved indication are derived from drug-labeling information.

2. Prices reflect the nationwide retail average for August 2009, rounded to the nearest dollar. Information is derived by *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* from data provided by Wolters Kluwer Health, Pharmaceutical Audit Suite®. Wolters Kluwer Health is not involved in our analysis or recommendations.

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