

## Patient information

# Gabapentin and its use in pain management

### Why do I need gabapentin?

Gabapentin is a drug used to treat nerve pain. This type of pain is often not relieved by normal painkillers. It can be used in combination with other painkillers to improve your pain relief.

### How does gabapentin work?

Gabapentin works by changing the way in which nerves send messages to your brain. When something presses on a nerve, or a nerve doesn't work properly in some way, the nerve can send false messages to your brain. The brain thinks that a part of your body is being hurt when it is not. This makes you actually feel pain. By altering the way nerves work, gabapentin may reduce your pain.

### Isn't gabapentin for treating Epilepsy?

Yes, gabapentin is used for treating epilepsy by 'calming down nerves'. Research has shown that gabapentin by a 'similar process' is also effective in helping to relieve certain types of pain.

### How long will gabapentin take to work?

You should notice that your pain starts to improve over one to two weeks after starting gabapentin, but it may take longer in some people. However, some feel benefit straight away. Your treatment will be reviewed when you next see the doctor or nurse.

### How long will I have to take gabapentin for?

If the gabapentin is helpful, you can continue and your treatment will be reviewed regularly. There is no possibility of you becoming addicted to the tablets. It is also important that you continue to take your regular painkiller, unless you have been advised to stop taking these by your doctor.

### How should I take gabapentin?

You should take gabapentin in addition to your current tablets unless told otherwise. Gabapentin is started at a low dose and increased gradually to minimise any side effects.

You should take gabapentin as shown in the table. If your pain completely disappears with a lower dose, you can stay on that dose rather than increasing to the next dose.

**Are there any side effects?**

All drugs have side effects, but they do not happen in all the people who take them. The most common side effects of gabapentin are dizziness, tiredness, drowsiness and weakness. Other possible side effects are detailed in the drug information sheet supplied with the tablets.

If you have troublesome side effects from gabapentin, speak to your doctors, nurse or pharmacist straight away. Side effects from gabapentin usually reduce or disappear after taking the same dose for a few days.

	DOSE				
Day	Morning		Afternoon		Evening

**Do I need any tests whilst I'm taking gabapentin?**

No, you will not need any special checks whilst you are taking gabapentin.

## **Can I drink alcohol whilst taking gabapentin?**

If the gabapentin makes you feel tired or gives you other side effects, then drinking alcohol may increase these side effects. Because of this, we advise that you should avoid drinking alcohol if these side effects are troublesome.

## **Is it safe for me to drive or operate machinery whilst I'm taking gabapentin?**

Gabapentin may cause drowsiness. If you feel affected by this, we advise that you should not drive or operate complex machinery until the effects have worn off.

## **Is it safe for me to take other medicines whilst I'm receiving treatment with gabapentin?**

Before you take or buy any new medicines – including herbal remedies – tell your doctor or pharmacist that you are taking gabapentin and ask their advice. If you are taking any antacids, avoid taking them **TWO HOURS BEFORE** and **UP TO TWO HOURS AFTER** your gabapentin dose.

## **What should I do if I forget to take a dose?**

You should take a missed dose as soon as you remember. However, if it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and take your medication as normal. **DO NOT 'double up' to make up for your missed dose.**

## **Stopping gabapentin**

Do not stop taking gabapentin unless your doctor tells you to. If gabapentin is discontinued then this is normally done gradually over a number of weeks. If it is stopped suddenly you may experience adverse effects, ie nausea, pain and sweating, anxiety and insomnia.

## **Remember:**

This medicine has been prescribed for you. It should not be taken by anyone else.

## **Additional information:**

The information in this leaflet is not intended to replace your doctor's advice. If you require more information, or have any questions, please speak to your doctor, or contact one of the following:

Clinical Nurse Specialist  
Telephone: 01284 713330

## **KEEP ALL MEDICINES OUT OF THE REACH OF CHILDREN**

*If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the disabledgo website link below:*

*<http://www.disabledgo.com/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust/main>*

© West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust