

Patient information

Gabapentin and its use in pain management

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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. 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 minimize 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.

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, such as 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 the Clinical Nurse Specialists on 01284 712528.

Important safety messages

- **Store all medicines safely:** make sure they cannot be seen or reached by children or vulnerable adults. Please check the pharmacy label for storage instructions such as 'store in the fridge'.
- **Never share your medicines:** your medicines have been prescribed only for you to take - nobody else.
- **Disposal of medicines no longer required:** unused medicines must be immediately disposed of safely. Safe disposal can be ensured by returning unwanted medicines to your community pharmacy or the dispensary if your GP is a dispensing practice
- **Use the medicine as directed on the label:** before you leave hospital make sure you understand exactly how and when to take your medicines, and you know how to dispose of your unused opioids. Further guidance can be found in the WSH Pharmacy department's "Information about your medications" leaflet.

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Clinical research

West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust is actively involved in clinical research. Your doctor, clinical team or the research and development department may contact you regarding specific clinical research studies that you might be interested in participating in. If you do not wish to be contacted for these purposes, please email info.gov@wsh.nhs.uk. This will in no way affect the care or treatment you receive.

Accessibility

If you require this leaflet in a different format, please contact the patient advice and liaison service on 01284 712555 or email PALS@wsh.nhs.uk

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