

Information for adult patients prescribed Gabapentin for pain

Why have I been prescribed this?

- Gabapentin is used to help reduce pain. It is especially good for nerve pain, such as burning, shooting, stabbing, pins and needles, crawling, electric shock like pain
- Gabapentin belongs to a group of medicines called anticonvulsants and can also be used to treat epilepsy
- Pregabalin is another pain medication that works in a similar way to Gabapentin, they shouldn't be prescribed together

How does it work?

- Gabapentin works by changing the way that nerves send messages to your brain. If the messages are reduced, then the pain will be reduced

When should I take it?

- Normally the starting dose is small and may be taken between one and three times a day. The dose will be increased gradually. Once stabilised Gabapentin should be taken three times a day for maximum effect, try to space the doses evenly throughout the day
- Normally a minimum dose of 300mg three times a day is needed to get any benefit. The dose may need to be increased no more often than every 2-3 days, up to a maximum of 1200mg three times a day
- In people whose kidneys are not working so well lower doses may be used and given less frequently, such as once a day or on alternate days. This is because Gabapentin can build up in the body
- If you are taking antacid medication, it is best to wait for two hours after taking it, before taking Gabapentin

How should I take it?

- The tablets should be swallowed whole, with a glass of water. It can be taken with or without food

How long will it take to work?

- Every patient is different. You may notice some initial benefit within a few days, however it may take up to 2 months for a full effect. Your GP, pharmacist or pain team may need to increase the dose for Gabapentin to be effective
- Gabapentin does not work for everyone. If you do not feel any improvement in your pain after 6 – 8 weeks, do not suddenly stop taking the tablets but speak to your GP, pharmacist or pain team to discuss reducing and stopping the medication

What if I forget or miss a dose?

- If you forget a dose then you can consider taking it when you remember that night but this may result in sleepiness the following day and affect your concentration, work or driving ability. The alternative is to wait until the next dose is scheduled
- However, if it is almost time for your next dose (in the next 2 hours), skip the missed dose and take your medication as normal
- Do not take two doses together

Can I take it long term?

- Yes, if it helps. You may wish to reduce treatment every so often, to check if your pain is still a problem. This should be done with the advice of your GP, pharmacist or pain team, gradually reducing your medication over a period of time, to reduce the risk of withdrawal symptoms

What are the possible side effects?

- Most side effects are mild and it is expected that they will reduce after several days. Generally side effects are worse after starting taking Gabapentin or increasing the dose
- Common side effects include: drowsiness, dizziness, fatigue, headaches and muscle tremor. If you have these side effects and they are severe contact your GP, pharmacist or pain team for advice
- Less common side effects include vision disturbances, indigestion, weight gain, leg swelling, memory loss, euphoria, mood changes or hallucinations and a rash. If any of these side effects occur contact your GP, pharmacist or pain team for advice
- Gabapentin can affect the respiratory system. Seek medical help if you experience any trouble breathing or are taking shallow breaths
- Some people develop severe anxiety if they miss a dose and some take more than prescribed to help their symptoms. Some people can become addicted to Gabapentin. If you are worried this is happening to you, discuss it with your GP, pharmacist or pain team

Tips to help manage side effects

- Headaches – Make sure you rest and drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids. Headaches should go away after the first week of taking Gabapentin. Seek advice from your GP, pharmacist or pain team if they last longer or are severe
- Feeling sleepy/ tired/ dizzy - If this doesn't wear off within 1-2 weeks your doctor may need to reduce your dose or increase it more slowly. If that doesn't work Gabapentin may have to be switched to a different medication
- Swollen arms and legs – try sitting with your feet raised and try not to stand for a long time. Gently exercising your arms might help. Speak to your GP, pharmacist or pain team for advice
- Weight gain – Gabapentin can increase your appetite. Do not snack on high calorie foods. If you are hungry in between meals eat fruit, vegetables and low calorie foods. Regular exercise will help keep your weight stable

Can I drink alcohol?

- Gabapentin can affect how the brain and spinal cord work, causing drowsiness, sedation and potentially fatal breathing difficulties, the risk is increased when drinking alcohol and taking certain medications such as opioids. Alcohol increases the sedative effects of Gabapentin, it is best not to drink alcohol when you start taking it and when increasing the dose. Once settled on a steady dose, you may drink alcohol in moderation but it may make you more drowsy than normal

Can I drive?

- Gabapentin may cause drowsiness. If this happens, do not drive. For further information on driving visit <https://www.gov.uk/drug-driving-law>

What should I tell my doctor/ pharmacist/ pain team?

- If you are allergic to any drugs or are taking any other medicines or herbal medicines
- If you are pregnant or breast feeding, or if you are planning to become pregnant in the future
- If you have a kidney problem, nervous system disorder, respiratory disorder or are prescribed other medications which affect your nervous system
- If you have or have had a history of excessive alcohol use, recreational drug use or addiction to prescribed or over-the-counter medication

What if I want to stop taking it?

- Do not stop taking Gabapentin suddenly, you might experience withdrawal symptoms including anxiety, difficulty sleeping, feeling sick, pain, sweating. There is also a risk of seizures. The dose should be reduced gradually with the help of your GP, pharmacist or pain team

Further information: <https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/gabapentin/>