

Gabapentin

Research has shown that gabapentin can help in managing neuropathic (nerve) pain. It works by reducing the number of signals sent through the nerves. This medication is also used for epilepsy.

Neuropathic pain is a type of pain that follows after damage to a nerve. It is thought to result from a “rewiring” of the nerves of the spinal cord. They are too sensitive and send too many pain signals. Normal touch can feel painful. There is often a “burning” or “shooting” feeling, or pins and needles. The pain can be there all the time or can come and go.

How to take gabapentin

The dose of gabapentin required varies from person to person. It is available in different strengths. It should be taken regularly three times each day, with a gap of 6-8 hours between doses.

The dose of gabapentin is increased gradually to help avoid side effects. Most patients will be advised to increase by 1 capsule each week up to 2 capsules three times daily (table 1). It can take up to 6-8 weeks to get the full benefit from gabapentin.

How long should I take gabapentin for?

In general, gabapentin will have to be taken for as long as you are requiring nerve pain relief. It should be reviewed every 6-12 months. Sometimes if someone has been taking gabapentin for a long time it may not work as well or may no longer be needed. If you, your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist think this is happening they may help you reduce the dose slowly to see if you still need it.

Do not stop gabapentin suddenly if you have been taking it for a long time as this may cause withdrawal symptoms. Reducing the dose slowly will help stop this happening.

Gabapentin has the potential to cause tolerance, dependence and addiction, although this is rare when taken as prescribed for

chronic pain. This is more likely if they are or have been dependent on other drugs, alcohol or nicotine. Speak to your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist if you have any concerns.

Are there any side effects?

All medications can cause side effects but not everyone will get them. A full list is in the patient information sheet with your prescription.

Some side effects can be reduced by slowly building the dose. Others may pass after the first few doses. If side effects go on and become a problem or you have others not expected then speak to your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist.

The most common side effects are drowsiness, dizziness, muscle fatigue and tremor. These side effects usually settle or reduce after a few days.

If gabapentin makes you feel drowsy you should avoid driving or operating machinery. It is a criminal offence to drive a vehicle whilst unsafe due to medication use. This might be worse when you start the tablets and each time your dose goes up. Alcohol may make the sleepiness worse and should be avoided where possible.

Less common side effects are visual disturbance, gastrointestinal upset, appetite changes, leg swelling, memory loss, mood changes or hallucinations and a rash. If you get these side effects contact your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist for advice.

If you experience any trouble breathing or are taking shallow breaths you should seek urgent medical help.

Other information

The dose of gabapentin may need to be reduced in people with kidney problems. It is recommended that you have a blood test to check your kidney function when taking gabapentin.

Medication in chronic pain

The benefit from taking medication should always be more than any side effects you may have. Only **you**

- know how bad your pain is
- are able to say if your medicine is helping
- know what side effects you are having

It may take a few weeks or several trials of different medications to find the best combination for you and your pain. It may help to keep a diary of your pain and other symptoms. Side effects often become less once you have been on a medicine for a few days.

Please read the patient information sheet given with each medication. It gives more information about the medicine and any side effects.

You can discuss your pain medication with your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist. They can give you advice on which pain medicines may help. They can help you find the best way to take your medicines. They can advise you on putting your dose up safely if your pain is worse and on taking less medication safely when your pain is less.

If your medicine is not helping you may not need to take it. Please talk to your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist first. Some pain medicines should not be stopped suddenly.

Do not share or take other peoples medication. Always advise your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist about any other medication or products you are taking for chronic pain. This includes anything bought from the pharmacy, herbal supplements or non- prescribed medicines.

Understanding how your medications work may help you to get the best pain relief from it with the least side-effects.



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Patient Information Leaflet



GETTING YOU ON TRACK TO RECOVERY

NHS Fife provides accessible communication in a variety of formats including for people who are speakers of community languages, who require Easy Read versions, who speak BSL, read Braille or use Audio formats.

NHS Fife SMS text service number 07805800005 is available for people who have a hearing or speech impairment.

To find out more about accessible formats contact:
fife-UHB.EqualityandHumanRights@nhs.net or phone 01592 729130

Table 1
Slower method of increasing the dose of gabapentin

SLOW track - increase the number of capsules or tablets every week as shown below.

Do not increase further if you are having side-effects.

How to take gabapentin - weekly rate of increase.

| Week | Capsule Strength | Number of capsules | | | Total daily dose |
|------|------------------|--------------------|-----|------|------------------|
| | | 8am | 2pm | 10pm | |
| 1 | 300mg | 0 | 0 | 1 | 300mg |
| 2 | 300mg | 1 | 0 | 1 | 600mg |
| 3 | 300mg | 1 | 1 | 1 | 900mg |
| 4 | 300mg | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1200mg |
| 5 | 300mg | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1500mg |
| 6 | 300mg | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1800mg |

Continue on this dose. Do not increase the dose further before discussion and agreement with the doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist.

Gabapentin comes in different strengths;

- 100mg and 300mg capsules
- 600mg and 800mg tablets

Table 2
Fast track way to increase the dose of gabapentin

FAST track - increase the number of capsules or tablets every few days as shown below.

If you get side effects do not increase as quickly. Try only increasing your dose each week instead (see SLOW track).

How to take gabapentin – faster daily rate of increase.

| Day | Capsule Strength | Number of capsules | | | Total daily dose |
|-------|------------------|--------------------|-----|------|------------------|
| | | 8am | 2pm | 10pm | |
| 1 | 300mg | 0 | 0 | 1 | 300mg |
| 2 | 300mg | 1 | 0 | 1 | 600mg |
| 3-7 | 300mg | 1 | 1 | 1 | 900mg |
| 8 | 300mg | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1200mg |
| 9 | 300mg | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1500mg |
| 10-14 | 300mg | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1800mg |

Continue on this dose. Do not increase the dose further before discussion and agreement with the doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist.