Sodium Valproate

Information for adults with epilepsy

This document can be provided in different languages and formats. For more information please contact the adult epilepsy nurses on 0115 970 9030.

What is Sodium Valproate used for?
Sodium Valproate is used to treat all forms of epilepsy.

Does it have other names?
Yes, one of the most common brand names for Sodium Valproate is Epilim. There are also slow-release formulas such as Epilim Chrono.

How often do I have to take it?
Usually once or twice a day. Always follow the instructions on the label. It is important to take your medicine at the right time. If you miss a dose take it as soon as you remember. If it is almost time for your next dose take the next dose immediately but do not double the dose. If you find it difficult to take your medication please speak to your doctor. Take Sodium Valproate after food.

Are there any side effects?
All medicines may have side effects. To help to keep these to a minimum you will have been started on a very small dose. This is so your body gets used to the medication. The dose will be built up gradually to the dose that is right for you.

The most common side effects occur when you first start taking the medicine. These may include nausea, stomach irritation, diarrhoea, weight gain and hair loss. It is rare for anyone to experience more than one or two of these side effects but all are possible. All would be expected to improve on reducing or stopping the drug. If they continue, or occur after you have been taking Sodium Valproate for some time, you should tell your doctor.

Please seek medical advice if you develop mood changes, distressing thoughts or feelings about suicide or self harm at any point during your treatment.

Can I drink alcohol?
Yes, in moderation, unless you have been advised otherwise. It is recommended that you limit yourself to one or two units per day. Half a pint of standard strength beer (4%) is 1 unit, one 175ml glass of wine (12%) is 2% and one single pub measure of spirits (40%) is 1 unit. Drinking may put you at risk of a seizure.

Does Sodium Valproate affect the oral contraceptive pill?
No, Sodium Valproate does not appear to affect the oral contraceptive pill. If you wish to discuss contraception issues either speak to an epilepsy nurse, your doctor or contact the Victoria health Centre, Nottingham on (0115) 8839000.
What if I want to have a baby?
Do not stop taking your medication. You should discuss this with your doctor or epilepsy nurse before you become pregnant. Any antiepileptic medication that you are taking may need to be reassessed before pregnancy. The aim is to achieve the best possible control of your seizures whilst keeping any risk to your baby as low as possible. Changes in medication will need to be made slowly so it is always better to plan ahead. It is recommended to take 5mg of folic acid each day for three months before you conceive and for the first three months of pregnancy. This is available on prescription.

What if I am already pregnant?
Do not stop taking your medication. You should make an appointment to see your doctor as soon as possible. You and your baby can then be followed up closely during the pregnancy. You may wish to register your pregnancy with the UK Epilepsy Pregnancy Register on (0800) 3891248 or look at their web site www.epilepsyandpregnancy.co.uk. Information sheets on women's issues are available from Epilepsy Action (contact details below).

Changing medication
Do not change your medication without seeking medical help. Sometimes you will be advised that changes need to be made to your medication. These changes will only occur after they have been discussed with you. As a general rule, a new drug will be introduced slowly, usually over several weeks or months. If you are stopping a drug, this will be withdrawn very slowly. In this way any side effects are kept to a minimum.

When changing drugs you may have more seizures than is normal for you. By altering the drugs gradually we hope to keep these to a minimum. It is advisable to always take the same brand of medication.

General information
Taking general measures to make your home safer can help to reduce the risk of accidents.
- Showering is generally considered safer than a bath.
- There are always potential dangers in the kitchen. Consider using a microwave instead of a cooker; turn saucepan handles towards the back of the cooker to avoid knocking them over.
- If you swim inform the pool attendant that you have epilepsy.
- If you continue to have seizures, however small, the law states that you are not allowed to drive.

People with epilepsy are entitled to free prescriptions. Please read any information that may be issued with your medication.

Useful contacts
- Epilepsy specialist nurses (Tel: 0115 970 9030 - this is a voicemail service for messages) For specific advice about your drugs, pre-pregnancy planning, work and other issues.
- General information about epilepsy Available from the stand in clinic 2, QMC - volunteers available most Mondays (9-12midday) and Fridays (9-12midday)
- Epilepsy Action (Helpline: 0808 800 5050)
- Epilepsy Society (Helpline: 01494 601400) Web: www.epilepsysociety.org.uk

Feedback
We appreciate and encourage feedback. If you need advice or are concerned about any aspect of care or treatment please speak to a member of staff or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS):

Freephone (QMC Campus): 0800 183 0204
From a mobile or abroad: 0115 924 9924 ext 65412 or 62301
E-mail: pals@nuh.nhs.uk
Letter: NUH NHS Trust, c/o PALS, Freepost NEA 14614, Nottingham NG7 1BR www.nuh.nhs.uk

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