

Information for Adult Patients who are Prescribed

Carbamazepine

For the Treatment of Pain



This information is not intended to replace your doctor's advice. We advise you to read the manufacturer's information for patients, which your pharmacist will supply with your medicine. Please keep all medicines away from children, vulnerable adults or pets.

Why have I been prescribed carbamazepine?

Carbamazepine is used to treat some types of persistent pain. It is especially good for nerve pain, such as burning, shooting or stabbing pain.

Carbamazepine belongs to the anticonvulsant group of medications, which are also used to treat epilepsy and other conditions.

You may notice that the information from the manufacturer may not mention your type of pain. Although carbamazepine is not licensed for the treatment of general chronic pain, it has been shown to be helpful in the management of certain types of pain, such as facial pain caused by Trigeminal Neuralgia. You are on this medicine to treat your pain.

How does carbamazepine work?

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

How long will it take to work?

It may take 2 - 4 weeks before you feel any pain relief. It may take longer (up to 2 months) to get to the right dose for you and to allow the medicine to build up in your body.

Carbamazepine 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 doctor, community pharmacist or nurse.

What should I expect?

It is rarely possible to help long-term pain completely by using medicines alone. This is because long-term pain arises through many different mechanisms, and most medicines only work for one of these.

In trials, most medicines for long-term pain provide on average a 30% reduction in pain. Some pains do not seem to respond to any painkilling medicines.

Medicines work best if you combine them with other ways of managing symptoms such as regular activity and exercise and doing things that are satisfying or enjoyable, such as work, study and social activities. Setting goals to help improve your life is an important way to see if these medicines are helping.

You should discuss, with your doctor, what you expect from the treatment.

When should I take it?

You should take carbamazepine two or three times a day, morning, afternoon and night. It is important to take your carbamazepine regularly, as prescribed for it to work properly. It is not a medication that you should use on an 'as required' basis.

You usually start carbamazepine at a low dose and increase it slowly to find the best dose for you. You and your doctor, nurse or community pharmacist will decide between you how quickly you increase your medicine. Normally you need a minimum dose of 100mg twice a day to get any benefit and the dose may need to be increased to 200mg three times a day.

Below is a guide on how to increase your medicine. You may increase it more slowly if you feel you are getting side effects, for example by going back a step for an extra week before increasing again. You can stay at a lower dose if you are getting good pain relief (you don't have to keep increasing the dose if you do not need to).

	AM	Midday	PM
Step 1	100mg	No medicine	100mg
Step 2	100mg	100mg	100mg
Step 3	100mg	100mg	200mg
Step 4	200mg	100mg	200mg
Step 5	200mg	200mg	200mg

How should I take carbamazepine?

You should swallow this medicine whole, with a glass of water. You can take carbamazepine before or after food.

What if I forget or miss a dose?

Take it as soon as you remember. However, if it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and take the next dose as normal. **Do not take two doses at the same time.**

What are the possible side effects?

Below are some side effects associated with carbamazepine use. The full list of potential side effects can be found in the leaflet that comes with the medication.

Very Common May affect more than 1 in 10 people	Common May affect up to 1 in 10 people
Dizziness	Fluid retention
Tiredness	Weight gain
Drowsiness	Blurred vision
Unsteady on feet	Dry mouth
Difficulty controlling movements	Headache
Nausea and vomiting	Easy bruising
Skin reaction (Hives)	Low sodium levels
Changes in liver function	

Generally side effects are worse after starting carbamazepine or increasing the dose. It is important to persist in taking carbamazepine as these side effects are usually mild and will wear off after several days.

Drowsiness is usually temporary. If you feel drowsy, you should not drive or operate machinery.

Drowsiness may occur as you increase your dose. If you feel especially drowsy in the morning it may help to take the night time dose earlier in the evening.

The risk of drowsiness may be increased if you are taking other medicines for pain such as other anticonvulsant medications, antidepressants or morphine like medicines.

Stop this medicine immediately if you experience any of the following and speak to your GP as soon as possible:

- Severe skin rash
- High temperature
- Sore throat, swollen glands, mouth ulcers,
- Unexplained bruising or bleeding
- Yellowing of your skin.
- Swollen ankles, feet or lower legs
- Joint or stomach pain
- Difficulty breathing

Also, you can help make sure medicines remain as safe as possible by reporting any unwanted side-effects via the internet at www.mhra.gov.uk/yellowcard alternatively you can call Freephone 0808 100 3352

Can I take this carbamazepine long-term?

Yes, if it helps. You may wish to reduce treatment every so often, to check if your pain is still a problem. You should speak to your GP or pain specialist about gradually reducing your medication over a period of time.

Can I drive?

Please see note above, If you experience drowsiness you should not drive. Please remember, you are responsible for deciding whether you are fit to drive.

Can I drink alcohol?

Alcohol and carbamazepine together cause sleepiness and poor concentration. You should avoid alcohol completely when you first start taking carbamazepine or when you increase your dose. You should also avoid alcohol if you are going to drive or operate machinery.

Once you are on a stable dose, you should be able to drink modest amounts of alcohol, **but only if the drowsiness has stopped**. You must take care with alcohol if you are also prescribed other medications that can cause sleepiness and poor concentration.

What should I tell the doctor?

- If you are allergic to any medicines.
- If you are taking any other medicines or herbal medicines.
- If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, or if you are planning to become pregnant.
- If you have a liver or kidney problem.
- If you have a heart problem
- If you have glaucoma
- If you have ever had any problems with your bone marrow
- If you have a blood disorder called porphyria
- If you have taken medications called monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs) used to treat depression over the previous 2 weeks
- 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 am pregnant or planning to become pregnant?

This medicine may cause birth defects in babies if taken during pregnancy. Women of child-bearing age must use appropriate contraception. However carbamazepine may affect oral contraception by making it less effective.

If you are on oral contraception, or plan to start it, please check with your GP that you are on a correct dose before you start carbamazepine.

What if I want to stop taking carbamazepine?

Do not stop taking carbamazepine suddenly as you might experience withdrawal symptoms. Speak to your healthcare professional (doctor, nurse, community pharmacist) who will be able to give you advice about stopping your medication.

However if you experience side effects that are troublesome (as described in the “Stop this medication immediately” section above) and you have only taken this medicine for a few days or weeks, you can usually stop it suddenly without withdrawal symptoms.

Below is an example of how to reduce the dose if you are on 200mg three times a day. You should always contact your GP for directions.

	AM	Midday	PM
Step 1	No medicine	200mg	200mg
Step 2	No medicine	No medicine	200mg
Step 3	Stop		

Remember!

- Don't run out of medicine.
- Ask for a repeat prescription before your medicine is finished.
- If you have any questions about this medicine please contact your GP or community pharmacist.

For more information about managing chronic pain, please see www.paindata.org