

Information for Adult Patients who are Prescribed

Gabapentin

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 gabapentin?

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

Gabapentin belongs to the anticonvulsant group of medications, which are also used to treat epilepsy. You are on this medicine to treat your pain.

How does gabapentin 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.

How long will it take to work?

It may take 2 - 4 weeks before you feel 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.

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 doctor.

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 gabapentin three times a day, morning, afternoon and night. It is important to take your gabapentin 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 gabapentin at a low dose and increase it slowly to find the right dose for you. You and your doctor, nurse or community pharmacist will decide how quickly you increase your medicine.

Below is a guide on how to increase your gabapentin dose. 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	No medicine	No medicine	300mg
Step 2	300mg	No medicine	300mg
Step 3	300mg	300mg	300mg

If your doctor, nurse or community pharmacist tells you to increase your dose at a later date, you would do this in a similar manner to the above. For example:

	AM	Midday	PM
Step 6	300mg	300mg	600mg
Step 7	600mg	300mg	600mg
Step 8	600mg	600mg	600mg

How should I take gabapentin?

You should swallow the capsules whole with a glass of water. You can take gabapentin before or after food. If you are taking antacid medication, please wait 2 hours before taking gabapentin.

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?

We advise you to read the information leaflet that is included with your medication. Below are some side effects associated with gabapentin 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
Drowsiness Tiredness Dizziness Lack of coordination Fever Viral infection	Infections, flu like symptoms Anorexia Increased appetite Fluctuations in mood: anger, depression, anxiety. Difficulty thinking Convulsions, jerky movements, tremor, poor coordination, Unusual eye movements Blurred or double vision Difficulty speaking Headache Sensitive skin Decreased sensation Vertigo High blood pressure Difficulty breathing Nausea and vomiting Constipation or diarrhoea Stomach pain, indigestion Flatulence Dry mouth Inflamed gums, problems with teeth Facial swelling, rash, itch, acne Joint pain, muscle pain Incontinence Difficulties with erection Fluid retention

Generally side effects are worse after starting gabapentin or increasing the dose. It is important to persist in taking gabapentin 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 your 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 medications.

If these side effects are severe, or last for more than a few days, or if you experience blurred vision, trembling, irregular heart beat, difficulty passing urine or a reaction to this medication, you should get advice from your GP, Community Pharmacist or **NHS 24 on 111**.

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 gabapentin 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 dose over a period of time.

Can I drive?

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

Can I drink alcohol?

Alcohol and gabapentin together cause sleepiness and poor concentration.

You should avoid alcohol completely when you first start taking gabapentin 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 in the future.
- If you have a kidney problem.
- 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 gabapentin?

Do not stop taking gabapentin 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.

Remember!

- Don't run out of medicine
- Ask for a repeat prescription before your medicine is finished
- If you have any queries you can ask your pharmacist, GP, or NHS 24 (call 111 for free from landlines or mobiles)

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

Much of the information in this document has been reproduced from the Faculty of Pain Medicine's patient information leaflet of a similar name which can be accessed here: <https://www.british-painsociety.org/british-pain-society-publications/patient-publications/>