

Medication Information for Youth

Gabapentin—Neurontin

What the Medicine Is Called and What It Is For

The name of your medicine may be confusing. Most drugs have two names: 1) a scientific name that we call a *generic name* and 2) a trade or *brand name*. The generic name of this medicine is gabapentin. The brand name is Neurontin.

Gabapentin was first used to help people with epilepsy (seizures, fits, convulsions), so it is sometimes called an *anticonvulsant*. It is now also called a *mood stabilizer*, because it is used to help people who have severe mood changes, sometimes called *mood swings*, especially in children and adolescents with bipolar disorder (manic-depressive disorder), depression, or trouble controlling anger. Gabapentin can reduce aggression, anger, and severe mood swings. It is thought to work by making brain cells less excitable.

How You Take the Medicine

It is very important to take the medicine exactly as the doctor or nurse tells you. Do not skip doses or take extra medicine without asking an adult. If you forget a dose, ask your parent(s) what to do.

This medicine is prescribed only for you. It should never be shared with anyone else.

You do not have to tell others that you are taking this medicine, but it is not something you should feel ashamed or embarrassed about. Many young people are helped by gabapentin. This medicine is not habit-forming, and you cannot become “hooked” on it. You should talk to your doctor or nurse about any questions you have about the medicine. It is important to remember that the medicine *helps* you. It cannot *make* you do anything or change you as a person.

If your stomach is upset, taking the medicine with food may help.

Caffeine (in coffee, tea, or soft drinks) may make you feel worse.

It is very important not to stop this medicine suddenly—it could be uncomfortable or even dangerous.

How Your Doctor Will Follow Your Progress

Before giving you the medicine, your doctor or nurse will talk with you and your parent(s) and may measure your height, weight, heart rate (pulse), and blood pressure. The doctor may order blood tests to be sure that you are in good health.

Be sure to tell your doctor or nurse about any other medicines or supplements you are taking, including vitamins, herbs, or aids to weight loss or bodybuilding. Also be sure to tell the doctor or nurse if you are using alcohol or drugs. Because many medicines may affect babies, it is very important to tell the doctor if you might be pregnant or if you are at risk of becoming pregnant.

Your teachers may be asked to fill out a form about your grades and behavior in school. A psychologist may give you some tests to see how you learn best.

Most doctors have regular appointments with young people who are taking medicine. You should use these visits to share any concerns you may have about your medicine and to talk about if it has helped you. From time to time, your physician or nurse may measure your height, weight, heart rate (pulse), and blood pressure to be sure that you are in good health while you are taking the medicine and that your kidneys are working well. Your doctor also will ask for regular reports from your parents and maybe from your teachers (with your permission) to see how well the medicine is working.

How the Medicine Might Affect You

In addition to the ways the medicine can help you, it may have other effects called *side effects*. Different medicines have different side effects. It is helpful to know about some of the most common side effects of your medicine so that you will understand what they are if they happen. Some people do not have any side effects. Some side effects are just uncomfortable, but others may mean a more serious problem with the medicine. Side effects are most common after starting the medicine or after a dose increase. They may go away with time, or the medicine can be adjusted or changed—ask the doctor.

You could have an allergy to any medicine, which might show up as a rash on your skin, swelling, itching, or trouble breathing.

Please tell your parent(s) and your doctor or nurse about any changes that you notice after taking the medicine. It is especially important to tell a responsible adult if you are feeling depressed or that you may not want to live; if you have thoughts of hurting yourself; or if you begin to feel more irritable, nervous, or restless.

Some medicines make people feel sleepy or less coordinated. If this medicine is making you sleepy, it is very important not to drive a car or ride a bicycle or motorcycle. After starting a new medicine or increasing the dose of a medicine, please be extra careful when driving a car, riding a bike, or using machines until you can tell how the medicine affects your alertness, attention, and coordination.

The most common side effects of gabapentin are dizziness, daytime sleepiness, and feeling tired. Less common side effects are problems with paying attention, feeling irritable or angry, clumsiness, muscle pain, shaking, and double or blurred vision. These sometimes go away after you have been taking the medicine for a while or if the doctor lowers the dose of medicine you are taking. Tell your parent(s) or the doctor if you are having trouble with any of these side effects.

Notes

Use this space to take notes or to write down questions you want to ask the doctor or nurse.
