

# Gabapentin for the Treatment of Nerve Pain

## Patient Information Leaflet

**If you have any questions about your medication please ask your prescriber (who may be a doctor, pharmacist or nurse).**

- Storage instructions: Please keep all medications in a safe place out of sight and out of reach from children, pets, and vulnerable adults.
  - Do not share your medication with anyone else.
- **Any unused medication should be returned to a pharmacy for safe disposal**

### Patient information

The information in this leaflet is to explain the safe use of gabapentin. It is not intended to replace advice from your prescriber (who may be a doctor, pharmacist or nurse). For more information, please see the manufacturer's information leaflet contained within your medication, or contact your GP (doctor's) surgery or pharmacy.

### What is gabapentin used for?

- Gabapentin is a medicine which may help improve your nerve pain, such as shooting, stabbing, or burning pain.
- Gabapentin works by changing the way that nerves send messages to your brain. If the messages are reduced, then the pain will partially be reduced.
- Gabapentin is also used to treat epilepsy and anxiety, but you are taking it for pain.

### How long will it take for gabapentin to work?

- Every person is different. It may take 1-2 weeks before you notice an improvement in your pain control. Gabapentin works well for some people but not everyone responds to gabapentin.
- **If gabapentin doesn't reduce your pain after 4-6 weeks, talk to your prescriber about reducing and stopping gabapentin. Do not stop taking gabapentin suddenly.**

### How should I take gabapentin?

- Gabapentin capsules should be swallowed whole, with a glass of water (on a full or empty stomach). Do not take more than prescribed.
- Do not take indigestion remedies 2 hours before or after you take this medicine.
- If you forget to take a dose, take it as soon as you remember unless it is time to take the next dose. Do not take two doses at the same time.

### Does gabapentin have any side effects?

- Most side effects are mild and are worse just after starting gabapentin or increasing the dose. Side effects usually go away after a few days of taking gabapentin, so try to keep taking it if you can. If you are worried, contact your GP (doctor's) surgery or speak to your pharmacy.
- **The most common side effects** include dizziness, drowsiness, reduced concentration, headache, and dry mouth. Some people may feel sick or have diarrhoea or constipation.
- **Less common side effects** include vision disturbances, indigestion, leg swelling, weight gain, memory loss, mood changes, hallucinations, or rash. There is a rare risk of breathing difficulties and heart failure when taking gabapentin. If you get any of these side-effects contact

**If your ability to drive is impaired, you must not drive or operate machinery.  
Alcohol increases the sedative effects of gabapentin.  
We advise you to avoid drinking alcohol when taking gabapentin.**

your GP (doctor's) surgery.

### Cautions:

- Taking gabapentin has been shown to be fairly safe in pregnancy. But if you are at risk of an unplanned pregnancy, are thinking of becoming pregnant, or are already pregnant, please seek advice from your prescriber as there may be safer alternatives, or you may choose to reduce and stop your gabapentin.
- Tapering and coming off gabapentin can sometimes be difficult due to the risks of addiction and dependence; and some people develop severe anxiety if they miss a dose of gabapentin. Please seek help and support from your Prescriber if this is the case.

### What if I take other medication?

- If you take other medication which can cause drowsiness and sedation, care is required as side effects are increased.
- **If you take strong pain medicines, such as opioids, it is important that you tell your prescriber (who may be a doctor, nurse, or pharmacist) as the dose of the opioid or gabapentin may need reducing.** Examples of opioid medicines include codeine, tramadol, buprenorphine, morphine, oxycodone and fentanyl.

### How long will I take gabapentin for?

- At the start of treatment, your prescriber (who may be a doctor, nurse or pharmacist) should explain how long it is safe for you to take gabapentin for and how to safely stop taking it.
- If gabapentin is helpful, your treatment will continue to be reviewed regularly. We recommend you reduce the dose every so often, at least every 12 months or after a few months of your pain being settled. This is because pain changes over time.
- Reducing the dose of gabapentin will let you check:
  - **If your pain is still a problem,**
  - **How well gabapentin is helping your pain and,**
  - **Help you check whether gabapentin has been causing any side effects.**

### Starting dose

- Your prescriber (who may be a doctor, nurse, or pharmacist) will give you instructions on how to start taking gabapentin.
- You can ask them to complete the table below. Slowly increasing the dose should lead to fewer side effects. If you get side effects, drop back to the previous dose. Once the symptoms have eased you can then try to increase the dose. See the section on side-effects.
- **Once your pain has improved to an acceptable level, do not increase the dose further. Continue on the same dose. You will need a review at 4-8 weeks.**
- Completing a **Patient Diary (example on page 3)** can help to show what benefits you are getting by taking the medication.

### Gabapentin starting dose

	Breakfast	Tea	Night
For 3 to 7 days			
For 3 to 7 days			
For 3 to 7 days			
For 3 to 7 days			

**Important information: Don't stop taking gabapentin suddenly as you might get withdrawal symptoms. If you have been taking a high dose for a long time, withdrawal symptoms can be more serious. Talk to your prescriber to get a safe gradual reduction plan.**

### Patient Diary (pain medication):

Keeping a record like this can be helpful when starting a new treatment. Documenting how you are feeling every few days will help show whether your treatment is suiting you or not. Remember to bring this with you to your next appointment.

	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date
Has your pain improved?							
How is your general mood? How do you feel in yourself generally?							
How are you sleeping?							
Have you been able to do any of the things that you had stopped doing because of your pain? For example: jobs around the house, work, driving, social activities, exercise & activity							
Have you had any problems with your medication?							
Have you experienced any side effects from your medication?							
Has your overall quality of life improved?							