

# How to Stop Gabapentin Safely When Used for Treating 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 help explain how you can safely stop gabapentin. It is not intended to replace advice from your prescriber (who may be a doctor, pharmacist or nurse).

### What is gabapentin used for?

- Gabapentin helps to control nerve (neuropathic) pain by changing the way that nerves send messages to your brain. If the messages are reduced, then the pain will be partially reduced.
- If you have pain that is not caused by nerve damage, gabapentin is unlikely to be helpful for you, but you may experience significant side effects.
- Gabapentin is also used to treat epilepsy.

### Why should I reduce my dose of gabapentin?

- You should reduce the amount of gabapentin medication that you take if advised to do so by your prescriber.
- Gabapentin may not be helping your pain as much as you think. Only around three or four in every ten people taking gabapentin for nerve pain see any significant improvement in their pain, which is at least a 30% reduction in pain.
- Gabapentin may be causing side effects, or you may be more at risk from side effects, for example: due to underlying health condition; older age; or because you are taking other medications, such as opioids which are a type of strong pain medicine.
- Gabapentin can be used long-term for nerve pain, but it is recommended that you reduce your dose every so often, at least every 12 months or after a few months of your pain being more settled. This is because pain can change over time, and medication that was helping a year ago may not be helping anymore.
- **Reducing your dose or stopping gabapentin will allow you to check:**
  - **if your pain is still a problem;**
  - **whether gabapentin is still helping to control your pain, and,**
  - **if gabapentin has been causing any side effects.**

## What side effects does gabapentin have?

- **Common side effects** include dizziness, drowsiness, sedation, headache, muscle tremor, weight gain, dry mouth.
- **Less common side effects** include vision disturbances, leg swelling, memory loss, mood changes (depression, anxiety, different thoughts), hallucinations, or rash. Gabapentin can also cause or worsen heart failure, and cause breathing difficulties, particularly if taken with other sedative medications.
- Whilst gabapentin is generally considered safe in pregnancy, please talk to your prescriber if you are at risk of becoming pregnant, are already pregnant or thinking about becoming pregnant in the future, as there may be safer alternatives to gabapentin available.

## How do I reduce my dose of gabapentin?

- Your prescriber can provide you with a safe dose reduction plan. You can ask them to fill in the table on page 3.
- Your dose reduction plan will depend on your current dose and how long you have been taking gabapentin for.
- **Do not stop taking gabapentin suddenly, as you might experience withdrawal symptoms.**
- Withdrawal symptoms may occur within a day and last up to seven days. The most common withdrawal symptoms are:
  - anxiety
  - difficulty sleeping
  - feeling sick, diarrhoea,
  - pain (includes headache); or
  - sweating.
- If you have been taking a high dose for a long time, withdrawal symptoms can be more serious. Although rare, seizures and feeling depressed (suicidal) have been reported; so, it is important to reduce the dose slowly.

## How will any withdrawal symptoms be managed?

- Withdrawal symptoms can be reduced or stopped from happening by reducing the gabapentin dose slowly.
- **If you do experience withdrawal symptoms do not reduce your dose further.** Keep on the dose that you have reduced to. If the symptoms aren't too bothersome you can try again to reduce the dose once the symptoms have eased.
- If you are affected by withdrawal symptoms, speak to your prescriber. You may need to reduce more slowly or by smaller amounts to manage these symptoms.

## What if my pain increases?

- If your pain increases, try to see if it settles, as it may be a temporary withdrawal symptom which will last a few days.
- If the pain doesn't settle, then do not reduce the dose further, and contact your prescriber. If it is safe to do so; they may recommend you increase your dose slowly back to a previous level, that helps control your pain.

## What else can I do to help manage my pain aside from medication?

- **Supported self-management can help improve quality of life with people experiencing long-term pain.**
- Try to increase non-drug ways which can help you manage your pain. This includes stretching, pacing your activities, relaxing or distraction.
- If you would like ideas for managing your pain, you could start looking here: [Resources for people with pain - Live Well with Pain](#) (created by a small group of healthcare professionals and people with lived experience of long-term pain)
- Please contact your prescriber if you are unable to access the internet and would like a paper copy; or would like some other ideas.

## Gabapentin reduction plan

- **Any reduction is likely to be good for your general health and wellbeing.**
- If you wish to slow down or speed up your dose reduction speak to your prescriber.
- **Warning:** After you start to reduce your dose of gabapentin it is important not to increase the dose without talking to your prescriber. Your body will soon get used to the lower dose of gabapentin and it can be dangerous to take a higher dose. There is a risk of overdose or death in this circumstance.

**Current dose of gabapentin:** .....  
You should complete this with your prescriber

<b>Week</b>	<b>Total Daily Dose (optional)</b>	<b>Morning</b>	<b>Afternoon</b>	<b>Bedtime</b>
0	_____mg	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )
1	_____mg	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )
2	_____mg	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )
3	_____mg	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )
4	_____mg	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )
5	_____mg	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )
6	_____mg	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )
7	_____mg	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )
8	_____mg	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )	_____mg Number of tablets /capsules ( )