

EPILEPSY DURHAM REGION

matters



Anti-Epileptic Drugs

Epileptic seizures can be controlled with anti-epileptic drugs in up to 70-80% of patients. These medications come in the form of tablets, capsules, or syrup. Some can also be given intravenously in a hospital.

Most people with epilepsy achieve seizure control with a single drug. The first medication that is tried is not always the right one for that person. Many people need to try more than one medication or add a second medication before they obtain seizure control. The choice of medication will depend on a variety of factors such as seizure type, epilepsy syndrome, age, potential unwanted effects, and cost.

How to Take Your Drugs

- Your doctor will explain how and when to take the medication and will discuss the more common side effects that can occur.
- Take your medication as prescribed. Altering the dosage or daily routine may cause unexpected seizures or side effects.
- It is important not to miss a dose because this increases the risk of a seizure. Ask your doctor what to do if you miss a dose of your medication. Try to establish a regular routine to help avoid forgetting medications.
- Develop the habit of refilling your prescription at least two weeks before your supply runs out particularly if you are going to be away from home.
- Alcohol can alter the seizure threshold and may cause people to forget to take their medications. Avoid alcohol other than moderate social drinking.

What to Ask Your Doctor

- What other medications might interfere with your medications? Some anti-epileptic drugs alter the effectiveness of oral contraceptives. If you are on oral contraceptives, ask your doctor if the anti-epileptic medications you're receiving will alter its effectiveness.
- What do I do if I miss a dose?

Unwanted Effects

All anti-epileptic medications can have side effects. These side effects occur most often when the medication is being started and usually lessen and disappear in a few weeks as your body becomes accustomed to it. They are less likely to occur if you are started on a low dose and the dose is increased slowly. If they are due to the dose being too high, they will often disappear with a reduction in dose.

Some people develop an allergic reaction to some anti-epileptic drugs. This is very common but is important to recognize. Ask your doctor if there is a risk of an allergic reaction to the drug you are taking. If that drug can cause an allergic reaction, ask your doctor what the signs of such a reaction are and what you should do if they appear.

Stopping the Medication

Do not stop an anti-epileptic drug without medical advice. Any withdrawal from anti-epileptic medications should be done slowly and under medical supervision. Stopping an anti-epileptic drug suddenly can provoke a seizure or seizures that can be more severe than usual.

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Monitoring Blood Levels

If seizures are well controlled blood tests are rarely necessary. Monitoring blood levels is often not needed but may be helpful in the following situations:

- when seizures are not controlled
- when there are symptoms that might be side effects
- when more than one anti-epileptic drug is used and there are unwanted effects
- in patients on phenytoin (Dilantin)

Routine Laboratory Tests

Blood tests to check liver function and bone marrow are sometimes performed prior to starting a medication. Serious drug reactions are very rare and routine laboratory monitoring has not been demonstrated to be useful. The best method for early detection is for the patient or guardian to know the early signs of such a reaction and what to do if they recognize these signs.

Specific Drugs

Information on anti-epileptic drugs becomes available on a continuous basis. Consequently, the most reliable information can be found on websites that are regularly updated. The links below give general information and information on specific drugs. They are from well-established epilepsy organizations and are more likely to be reliable than websites produced from smaller organizations.

Epilepsy Foundation (USA) This site is well designed but only has information on drugs that are available in the USA. E.g. there is no information on clobazam or nitrazepam.

<http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org/answerplace/Medical/treatment/medications/typesmedicine/>

The National Society for Epilepsy (UK) This site is well designed and is organized by the major epilepsy organization in the UK. <http://www.epilepsynse.org.uk/pages/info/leaflets/index.cfm>

Epilepsy Ontario This site is well organized and provides fairly clear information on specific anti-epileptic drugs. However, when last checked it did not include levetiracetam (Keppra) and oxcarbazepine (Trileptal).

<http://www.epilepsyontario.org/client/EO/EOWeb.nsf/web/Medications+Main>

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