

# Gabapentin

Information and advice for patients

## Pain Management

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### What is Gabapentin?

Gabapentin is an epilepsy medication which can also be used to relieve some types of pain. The exact way that it works isn't clear but it affects chemicals and nerves in the body that send excessive pain signals to the brain.

### What is the benefit of taking Gabapentin?

The benefit of taking Gabapentin is that it can ease long-term (chronic) nerve (neuropathic) pain such as burning, tingling, shooting, pins and needles and 'strange' sensations. Gabapentin can also improve your sleep.

Unlike some other painkillers, Gabapentin will only work if you take it regularly and not just when you feel you need it. Gabapentin may not begin to give pain relief until 2-3 weeks after you have started taking it, and it may take up to 6 weeks for you to feel the full benefit so you need to be patient.

### What are the risks of taking Gabapentin?

There is a risk you may not experience enough benefit from taking Gabapentin. It is important that you continue taking it for the first 6 weeks before assessing how much pain relief it gives you.

Gabapentin can also cause the following side effects:

- Feeling or being sick
- Diarrhoea
- Tummy pain
- Constipation
- Appetite changes
- Weight gain
- Mood changes
- Movement changes

There is a potential risk of dependence with Gabapentin.

A full list of possible side effects can be found in the manufacturer's leaflet that comes with the medication.

If you experience any of these side effects and are concerned please see your GP.

### **What are the risks of not taking Gabapentin?**

The risk of not taking Gabapentin is that you won't experience the benefits it can give.

### **What are the alternative treatments?**

There are a variety of other medications that can be used for nerve pain if Gabapentin is not successful or you do not wish to use it. For information about suitable alternative medications please speak to your doctor.

### **Before taking Gabapentin**

Before taking this medication please let your doctor or nurse know if you are trying to become pregnant are pregnant or breast feeding and if you have any heart or kidney problems as this medication may not be suitable for you.

You should also inform your doctor or nurse of any other medications, including herbal remedies, you are taking.

Make sure you read the manufacturer's information leaflet that comes with the Gabapentin before taking it.

### **How to take Gabapentin**

Gabapentin comes as a tablet or capsule which should be taken at night, shortly before you go to bed.

Your doctor will prescribe the dose of Gabapentin you need to take. The dose may be gradually increased and you will be advised on how and when to do this. Do not take a higher dose than you have been prescribed.

Gabapentin should be taken at least 2 hours after any antacid is taken, as they reduce the effectiveness of the medication.

If you forget to take a dose do not worry, skip the missed dose and then continue with your next dose as usual.

You will be given an initial 4 week prescription and we will write to your GP. From the 1st April 2019 Gabapentin has been reclassified as a class C substance and schedule 3 controlled drug. This means you will no longer be able to obtain as a repeat prescription as it will need to be reviewed every 30 days. So make sure you get an appointment with your GP before your medication runs out.

### **Precautions**

You should not drive or use complex machines until you know how Gabapentin affects you.

Please make sure any health professionals seeing you are aware that you are taking Gabapentin.

Check the expiry date of your medication before using it.

## Storing the medication

Store the tablets in a cool, dry place out of reach and sight of children. Do not store them in the fridge.

## Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns about this treatment please contact:

### Pain Management

0121 507 4866

Monday – Friday, 9am – 4pm

If you have any problems outside of these times, or are experiencing severe side effects, please contact your GP.

## Further information

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our website [www.swbh.nhs.uk](http://www.swbh.nhs.uk) and follow us on X @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs](http://www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs).

## Sources used for the information in this leaflet

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National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. 2013. *Neuropathic pain in adults: pharmacological management in non-specialist settings* [Clinical guideline 173]. [Online]. London: NICE. Available from: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg173> [Accessed 16th March 2023].

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