Anticonvulsant drugs for the treatment of pain

Gabapentin
Neurontin
Pregabalin
Lyrica

Information for patients
Introduction

This leaflet will give you a better understanding of Anticonvulsant drugs. It will tell you how they can help pain, and how they should be taken. It will also explain the common side effects to look out for.

What are Anticonvulsant drugs?

This is a group of drugs normally used to treat epilepsy which are also useful in treating pain. They are particularly helpful where there is nerve damage which may produce pain that is burning and shooting in nature. They can also help you sleep at night as one of the side effects is drowsiness.

How can Anticonvulsant drugs help me?

It is hoped that Anticonvulsants can help you by:

- ‘calming down’ the nerves that report pain
- reducing pain
- improving sleep
- helping you cope with the pain.

How and when should I take them?

Your doctor will usually start you on a low dose and then ask you to gradually increase it until you find the dose which works best for you. It is very important that you follow the instructions on your prescription.

Anticonvulsant drugs usually come in the form of a capsule and are taken 1-3 times a day depending on the instructions from your GP or Pain Consultant. It is advisable to start by taking a dose at bedtime as they can make you feel drowsy.

If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If it is nearly time for your next dose, do not double up, just miss the dose you forgot.
What are the side effects?

Anticonvulsants can cause unpleasant side effects which may be worse in the first few days while your body is getting used to them. The most common are:
- dizziness
- drowsiness
- weight gain
- dry mouth.

Other less common side effects include swelling of the legs, blurred vision, headache, vomiting and diarrhoea. You may only experience one, or none at all, but it is important you are aware of them.

If you find it difficult to cope with side effects we suggest you speak to your GP. Alternatively you can leave a message for the nurses on the Pain Relief Unit’s advice line: **Tel (01865) 857 107**.

Please remember that if you want to stop taking your Anticonvulsant capsules they should not be stopped suddenly. They must be reduced slowly over time, preferably with advice from your GP or Pain Consultant. **By stopping them suddenly you may experience some side effects.**

How long do I have to take them and what should I do if my pain does not improve?

It can take a few weeks for you to notice the full benefit of the Anticonvulsants so it is important to continue with them, particularly as you have probably started on a low dose. The doctor will usually prescribe a gradually increasing dose for you to take over several weeks.

If the Anticonvulsants help your pain then you can continue to take them for as long as you need them.

Will Anticonvulsant drugs affect my other medicines?

When your GP or Pain Consultant prescribes an Anticonvulsant for you they will take into account your medical history and the other tablets
you may be taking. It is important to tell the doctor about any over-the-counter medicines or herbal remedies you may be taking as some of these may have an affect on prescription medicines. Care should be taken with indigestion remedies as these can reduce the effect of the Anticonvulsants.

Pregnancy

If you are a woman planning a pregnancy it is important to speak to your GP before starting an Anticonvulsant. If you think you may have become pregnant while taking an Anticonvulsant you should speak to your GP as soon as possible.

Useful telephone numbers

**Pain Relief Unit – Nurse Advice**

Voicemail: **01865 857 107**

or

Email: **painreliefteam.ouh@nhs.net**

**Please note:**

For appointment queries contact **01865 572 079**

Reference:

British National Formulary – BNF.org

If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221473** or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**