



Anti-Epileptic Medications

Epileptic seizures can be controlled with anti-epileptic medications 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 medication. However, 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 complete 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 Medication

- 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. If you miss a dose you can usually take it as soon as you remember unless it is within two hours of the next dose. 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. Taking medications with meals and/or using a pillbox with compartments for each day of the week may help.
- 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 can cause people to forget to take their medications. Avoid alcohol other than moderate social drinking.

Unwanted Effects

All anti-epileptic medications can have side effects. Ask your doctor about potential 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, the dose is increased slowly, and you are taking only one medication. If they are due to the dose being too high, they will often disappear with a reduction in dose. Taking more than one anti-epileptic medication can increase the risk of unwanted effects. A change of medications may be necessary if you continue to have unwanted effects despite adjustment of the dose.

Some people develop an allergic reaction to some anti-epileptic medications. This is not very common but is important to recognize because the medication must be stopped. Ask your doctor if there is a risk of an allergic reaction to the medication you are taking. If that medication 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 medication without medical advice. Any withdrawal from anti-epileptic medications should be done slowly and under medical supervision. Stopping an anti-epileptic medication suddenly can provoke a seizure or seizures that can be more severe than usual.

What to Ask Your Doctor

- What other medications might interfere with other medications I take and will other medications or herbal medicines I take possibly interfere with my anti-epileptic medication(s)? 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?
- What are the potential side effects of the anti-epileptic medications?
- Is there a possibility of an allergic reaction?

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 medication 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 medication 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.

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You can join the BC Epilepsy Society as a member and receive all the program and service benefits.

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