

Patient information

Gabapentin and Pregabalin for the Treatment of Short Term (Acute) Pain

Department of Pain Medicine

This information leaflet is for patients who have been treated with **gabapentin or pregabalin** in hospital for the relief of short-term pain and who need to continue taking these at home following discharge.

How do gabapentin and pregabalin work?

Gabapentin and pregabalin belong to a group of medicines called anticonvulsants which are used to treat epilepsy. **They are also used to treat some types of pain.**

Gabapentin and pregabalin work by changing the way that nerves send messages to your brain. If the messages are reduced, then the pain will be reduced.

Why have I been prescribed gabapentin or pregabalin?

Your doctor or the Inpatient Pain Team have recommended that you take gabapentin or pregabalin to relieve the pain caused by your illness, injuries or surgery.

In short-term (also called acute) pain, gabapentin and pregabalin can help to reduce pain and reduce the amount of other painkillers (such as morphine) that you need to take.

This can be useful after surgery or trauma and can help to reduce side effects such as constipation and sickness.

How do I safely take gabapentin or pregabalin at home?

Following surgery or trauma, it is important that you take all medicines as directed by your doctor, including gabapentin or pregabalin.

For these types of pain, gabapentin or pregabalin will usually be prescribed for a short time only, often for 7-14 days while you recover from your surgery or injury. You may need to take them for longer, depending on your type of surgery or illness.

If you were not already taking gabapentin or pregabalin before admission to hospital, you should not need to take them long term.

If you do need to take them for longer, we may also ask your GP to review these medicines as you recover at home.

What are the possible side effects?

Like all medicines, gabapentin and pregabalin have possible side effects, although not everybody gets them.

Most are mild and will go away after a few days.

- Common side effects of gabapentin and pregabalin include: drowsiness, dizziness, fatigue (feeling tired) and tremor (shaking).
- Less common side effects include vision disturbances, impotence, indigestion, leg swelling, memory loss, mood changes, hallucinations and a rash.

Gabapentin can cause breathing problems, but this is rare (less than 1 in 1000 patients.) The risk of this is increased if gabapentin is taken with medicines containing strong opioids, such as morphine.

If you experience any trouble breathing or notice you are taking shallow breaths, you should seek medical help immediately.

If you are worried about any of these side effects, or you experience any and they are troublesome, contact your doctor or pharmacist for advice.

Can I drink alcohol?

Alcohol can increase the drowsiness that some people experience when taking gabapentin or pregabalin. If you experience drowsiness then it is best not to drink while taking gabapentin or pregabalin. If you do drink then you should do so in moderation, and **be aware that you may become more drowsy than usual.**

Can I drive?

Gabapentin and pregabalin may cause drowsiness. **If this happens, do not drive.**

Remember that some other medicines that you may have been prescribed for short term pain, like morphine or oxycodone, can also cause drowsiness.

If you do not feel safe to drive then you should not do so.

The law in the UK allows you to drive if you are taking gabapentin or pregabalin, but you must be safe to do so.

If you drive and are found to be unsafe you may be subject to prosecution.

The only organisation that can advise you about your legal right to hold a driving license is the DVLA.

What if I want to stop taking gabapentin or pregabalin?

Do not stop taking suddenly as you may experience withdrawal symptoms. Seek advice from your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

Pregabalin may slightly increase the risk of birth defects if used in pregnancy. Patients should continue to use effective contraception during treatment and avoid use in pregnancy unless absolutely necessary and discussed with your doctor.

There is a lack of safety data for gabapentin use during pregnancy, therefore it is not usually recommended.

Pregabalin and gabapentin are both excreted into breastmilk, the effect on the infant is unknown and therefore use while breastfeeding is also not recommended.

Where can I get more information?

If you have any questions about gabapentin or pregabalin, or any of the medicines **you have been discharged you with then you can call the Medicines Hotline on 0151 529 3208 Monday – Friday 8:30am – 5:00pm (excluding bank holiday)**

There will also be a patient information leaflet in the box of tablets, but you may notice that this does not mention your type of pain. **You should still take these medicines as directed by your doctor or member of the Inpatient Pain Team.**

You can also speak to your Pharmacist or your GP for advice about any of your medicines.

Feedback

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Further information

If you have any questions please contact Aintree Hospital Medicines Hotline

Monday to Friday 8:30am – 5:00pm (excluding Bank Holidays)

Tel: 0151 529 3208

Useful Websites

The British Pain Society

<https://www.britishpainsociety.org/people-with-pain/>

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All Trust approved information is available on request in alternative formats, including other languages, easy read, large print, audio, Braille, moon and electronically.

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