

Gabapentin

Gabapentin (neurontin) is a medication which is FDA-approved for treating seizures, restless leg syndrome, and pain related to postherpetic neuralgia. Research has also identified a wide array of other benefits for gabapentin including:

- Anxiety (particularly social anxiety)
- Insomnia
- Alcohol abuse (up to 1,800mg/d)
- Marijuana abuse
- Alcohol or benzodiazepine withdrawal
- Prevention of bipolar disorder
- Chronic pain
- Tremor
- Itch

Gabapentin is generally well tolerated and is free of weight gain.

How it works

Gabapentin enhances the release GABA, a neurotransmitter involved in anxiety. Its effects are similar to the anticonvulsants pregabalin (lyrica) and tiagabine (gabitril).

How should I take it?

Gabapentin can be divided two to three times per day or taken all at once, with or without food. The levels start to drop in your blood stream 5-8 hours after taking it. Most people prefer to take it at night, as it can cause drowsiness, but it is fine to take in the morning if that works better for you.

Some people take gabapentin on an as-needed basis, such as for anxiety or sleep.

Most studies of anxiety used 2000-3000 mg/day. Lower doses may be used for sleep.

Gabapentin is available as an extended-release preparation (Horizant, brand only) which is optimized for treating restless leg syndrome.

What if I forget a dose?

Take the missed dose as soon as you remember it. However, if it is almost time for the next dose, skip the missed dose and continue your regular dosing schedule. Do not take a double dose to make up for a missed one.

How long do I need to take it?

How long you take gabapentin will depend on the reason you started it.

What happens if I stop it?

Gabapentin is not addictive and does not cause withdrawal symptoms. You may read that stopping gabapentin can cause seizures; this warning only applies to people who take it for seizures.

Side effects

These side effects tend to improve with time or by lowering the dose:

Dizziness, dyscoordination, drowsiness, concentration problems.

Swelling (edema) is possible.

As you are starting the medicine, use caution when driving or performing tasks that require alertness. This should not be a problem once you have adjusted to the medicine and know how it affects you.

Pregnancy: Gabapentin has not been adequately evaluated during pregnancy.

Interactions

Recreational drugs: Alcohol can increase the dizziness and dyscoordination of gabapentin.

Maalox reduces gabapentin by 20%, so take gabapentin at least 2 hours after Maalox. Gabapentin decreases Vicodin (hydrocodone) levels by up to 20%.

Other medications: Gabapentin has few significant interactions because it is not metabolized through the liver. The web sites below help you check for drug interactions. You should talk with us about the information you find as many drug interactions have only a mild effect:

www.webmd.com/interaction-checker
reference.medscape.com/drug-interactionchecker

How to store and dispose of medication

- Keep out of the reach of children.
- Store away from heat, direct light and damp places.
- To safely dispose of unwanted pills: Do not pour in the toilet or sink (it will enter the water supply). To prevent children or pets from eating it, mix unwanted pills in a bag with a little water and inedible trash (such as coffee grounds or kitty litter) and throw in the trash.

Cost and insurance coverage

Gabapentin is available in generic form. If you are paying out-of-pocket, the lowest cost is usually found at Costco (336-970-2300; you do not need to be a member to use their pharmacy).

Quick facts

Brands	Neurontin, Horizant
Dose range	100-3,600mg/day
Sizes	Caps: 100, 300, 400mg Tabs: 600, 800mg Liquid: 250/5ml
Release date	12/30/1993
FDA-approval	Epilepsy (seizures), postherpetic neuralgia, restless leg syndrome (Horizant form)

—Chris Aiken, MD, updated 2/15/2014