

Sodium valproate (Epilim/Valpro)

Information for patients

What is it for?

Sodium valproate was first used to control epilepsy. Now it is also used (alone or with lithium) to control abnormal mood changes.

When will it work?

It may take two weeks or longer to feel some improvement, so do not be discouraged if the effects are not immediate. The dosage needs to be adjusted to suit you, so tell the doctor how you feel at each visit.

How long do I need to take it?

Your doctor will discuss the likely benefits of taking it and how long the treatment may last. Feeling well does not mean that you can stop taking the tablets. It means that the tablets are keeping you well. Sodium valproate is not addictive. Talk to your doctor before you stop taking the tablets.

How and when do I take the tablets?

You may start with a low dose. This will be gradually increased to find the right amount. Take these tablets with food to reduce stomach upset. The specially coated tablets must be swallowed whole. The plain tablets can be crushed. Both types of tablets should be taken with water (not fizzy drinks).

What happens if I miss a dose?

If you forget to take a dose at the normal time, take it when you remember. If it is almost time for the next dose, then just take the normal amount. Do not take a double dose.

Do I need blood tests?

It is important to have blood tests to check that your sodium valproate dose is at the right level. Sodium valproate will be less effective if it is at low levels in your blood. If it is too high, you could get sodium valproate toxicity.

What else should I tell my doctor?

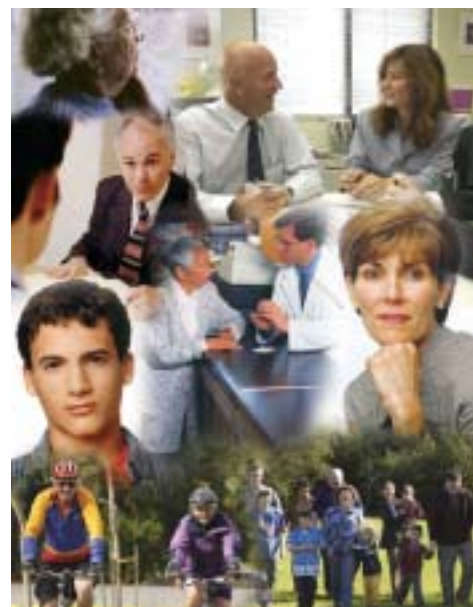
- If you notice any mood changes.
- (For women) If you miss a period, think you may be pregnant or you intend getting pregnant.

What about side effects?

You may get side effects before you start to feel better. They can often be helped by adjusting your medication or by other methods. Do not stop taking your medication abruptly, but talk to your doctor or pharmacist about any concerns you have. If you experience any side effects, report them to your doctor.

Common side effects include:

- Mild stomach cramps
- Nausea and vomiting
- Mild diarrhoea
- Headache
- Weight gain
- Change in menstrual periods
- Trembling of hands and arms
- Drowsiness
- Rash.



Uncommon side effects include:

- Severe stomach cramps
- Unusual bruising or bleeding
- Changes in vision
- Spots before eyes
- Confusion, lethargy, vomiting
- Swollen face
- Yellow eyes or skin (jaundice)
- Hair loss/change in hair texture
- Persistent fever or sore throat.

Should you experience any of these uncommon side effects while taking sodium valproate, you need to contact your doctor urgently.

Toxicity

You may have toxicity if you start to experience:

- Severe dizziness
- Severe drowsiness
- Palpitations.

If you think you have toxicity, tell your doctor today.

What else should I be careful with?

- Aspirin, which may increase the amount of sodium valproate in your blood, so always check with a doctor or pharmacist before taking tablets containing aspirin.
- Alcohol, which may make you more dizzy or sleepier than usual.
- Driving a car or operating machinery – your reactions may be slower.

Always tell any other doctor, pharmacist or dentist you may visit that you use this medicine. Some medicines can react with others, even those you buy without a prescription.

Note to health professionals:

This leaflet should not replace verbal counselling. In particular, this leaflet is not a substitute for informed consent. This leaflet provides information for patients taking sodium valproate. Reference to any drug or substance does not necessarily imply recommendation by the Victorian Department of Human Services for its use.

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