

## Patient information sheet: Gabapentin

### What type of drug is it?

Gabapentin is a drug used for the treatment of epilepsy (antiepileptic). Although still used for this it is now used more often for the treatment of chronic pain, especially pain coming from nerve irritation (neuropathic pain). It works by stabilizing nerves which have become over-active, and are sending unwanted pain signals to your brain.

### Is it safe?

Gabapentin has been used successfully for many years in thousands of patients. In order to be used safely it is important that you have told your pain specialist about any other medications you are taking or recently taken (including those you buy over the counter in a chemist) and any medical problems that you currently have or previously suffered from. Particularly you should inform your pain specialist or GP if you suffer or have previously suffered from kidney or liver problems or **are** currently taking any opioid medications.

NHS England have advised that Gabapentin has been shown to have the potential to be abused and to lead to dependence. You should not share this medication with others.

### Are there any side effects?

As with all medicines Gabapentin can cause side effects, but not all people are affected by them. Side effects when starting or increasing the dose of Gabapentin are moderately common. Most commonly people notice “flu like” symptoms, mental clouding or fuzziness. These effects can limit the amount you may be able to take. Weight gain may occur.

A very small number of people, when taking Gabapentin, develop symptoms of an allergic reaction such as a skin rash, swelling of the hands, lips and throat. If you develop these you should stop taking Gabapentin and contact your doctor immediately.

Gabapentin may have a minor or moderate influence on your ability to drive as it may cause drowsiness, dizziness or other related symptoms. This is especially true at the beginning of the treatment and after an increase in dose.

If you find the side effects are too much and you don't find any beneficial effects then stop the drug. Where possible you shouldn't abruptly stop taking Gabapentin but reduce your dose in reverse order to the way in which you had increased it.

### How will it help me?

Gabapentin affects the way pain messages are transmitted in the brain. Most people note a reduction in pain but this may take a few weeks of gradually increasing the dose.

### How should I take it?

A dosage regime will be tailored to each patient. Everyone is different and a sufficient dose for one person might not be enough for another, this is normal. It is important to start with a small dose and build up slowly - **the slower the build up the less the side effects**. Gabapentin is best taken three times a day. Most adults should start with a prescription of 100mg capsules for the first week. Gabapentin is most commonly supplied in 100mg or 300mg capsules. We find that a slow increase in your dose is often better tolerated and therefore suggest the following dosing:

**Week 1:**

<b>Day 1</b>	One 100mg capsule taken at a convenient time of the day
<b>Day 2</b>	Two 100mg capsules taken at two evenly spaced intervals through the day
<b>Days 3-7</b>	Three 100mg capsules taken at three evenly spaced intervals through the day

**After the first week:** If you find you are getting some benefit from your current dose then continue at this dose. If you want to increase your dose slowly, simply add 100mg to each of your three daily doses every 2-3 days.

Otherwise follow the suggestion below and ask your GP to your supply of 300mg capsules and increase by:

<b>Week 2</b>	300mg (1 capsule) taken at three evenly spaced intervals through the day
<b>Week 3</b>	600mg (2 capsules) taken at three evenly spaced intervals through the day

**WE DO NOT RECOMMEND INCREASING BEYOND THIS DOSE WITHOUT A REVIEW BY EITHER InHEALTH PAIN MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS OR YOUR GP**

As Gabapentin can take some time to show benefit, where possible you should try trialing Gabapentin for 3-8 weeks, with at least 2 weeks at the highest tolerated dose before deciding it is not effective.

**If you do choose to stop taking Gabapentin it is recommended to reduce your dose over at least 1 week, do not stop abruptly. Speak to your pain specialist or GP first as they can help you.**

You should take the capsules at least 2 hours after taking any indigestion remedies such as Gaviscon®.

Gabapentin is supplied as capsules in strengths of up to 600mg, above this dose you may receive this as tablets instead of capsules from your GP.

**Who do I contact with queries or concerns?**

The information in this leaflet is to guide your use of Gabapentin safely. Further information is available inside the medication package.

If you have any further questions or concerns about taking this medicine please contact your prescribing GP or dispensing pharmacist.