



Antiepileptic drugs (AEDs) do not cure epilepsy. But taken regularly in the form of tablets, capsules or syrup they decrease the abnormal brain activity causing seizures. In turn they can reduce or stop seizures, often with minimal or no side-effects.

Choice of medication

The medication chosen will depend on the person's type of seizure, age, gender, desire to have children, type of employment, lifestyle, the need to drive and many other individual factors.

Commencing medication

Medication is usually started slowly, gradually building the dose over days or weeks, depending on the drug. During this time its effectiveness and side-effects should be closely monitored. If the medication is unsuccessful, a second medication is usually added and, after a stabilising period, the first one may be withdrawn.

Many people with epilepsy achieve seizure control with one medication (*monotherapy*). However for some, more than one medication (*rational polytherapy*) will be necessary.

In children, medication is usually calculated by body weight and if the child has a growth spurt a breakthrough seizure may occur. This doesn't mean the medication is not working or the seizures are getting worse. It may simply mean a medication review is needed and possibly an increase in dose.

Duration of therapy

This depends on several factors: the epilepsy syndrome, tolerance of the drug, seizure type, the rate of response to medication, and the length of time seizure-free. Social factors such as driving and employment also come into consideration. For some, therapy is for life.

Withdrawal of medication

Any withdrawal from medication should be done slowly and always under medical supervision. **Suddenly stopping medication can provoke a seizure and possibly a medical emergency.**

Unwanted effects

Unfortunately, no drug exists which does not produce side-effects in some people. But most unwanted effects disappear after the first few weeks of therapy and serious side-effects are uncommon. The doctor will advise of any possible reactions that may require immediate attention such as an allergic rash. All known unwanted effects are listed in the manufacturer's product information sheets. **Ask for information if you do not receive it.**

Some medications are associated with a higher risk of birth defects than others. Women of child-bearing age should discuss this aspect of medication choice prior to commencing therapy.

Blood level monitoring

The indications for the monitoring blood levels include the use of Phenytoin, poor seizure control, polytherapy with unwanted effects, and epilepsy in the very young, the elderly or disabled. Other blood tests to check liver function and bone marrow are sometimes performed. If seizures are well controlled, blood tests are seldom necessary.

Medications used for epilepsy

- ⚡ Carbamazepine (*Tegretol, Teril*)
- ⚡ Clobazam (*Frisium*)

- ❖ Clonazepam (*Rivotril*)
- ❖ Ethosuximide (*Zarontin*)
- ❖ Gabapentin (*Neurontin*)
- ❖ Lamotrigine (*Lamictal*)
- ❖ Levetiracetam (*Keppra*)
- ❖ Methylphenobarbitone (*Prominal*)
- ❖ Oxcarbazepine (*Trileptal*)
- ❖ Phenobarbitone (*Phenobarbitone*)
- ❖ Phenytoin Sodium (*Dilantin*)
- ❖ Primidone (*Mysoline*)
- ❖ Sodium Valproate (*Epilim, Valpro*)
- ❖ Sulthiame (*Ospolot*)
- ❖ Tiagabine (*Gabitril*)
- ❖ Topiramate (*Topamax*)
- ❖ Vigabatrin (*Sabril*)

New drugs being trialled by patients under doctors' supervision

- ❖ Zonisamide (*Zonegran*)
- ❖ Lyrica (*Pregabalin*)

Taking antiepileptic medication regularly is crucial in the management of epilepsy. Most people will miss one or more doses at some time, whether this is due to forgetfulness, unwanted effects of medication or lifestyle. It is important to identify reasons for not taking medication so that options can be discussed with your doctor.

Other medications

AEDs are known to interact with other medications and some over-the-counter drugs. Always ask your pharmacist about any possible interactions with medications, complementary therapies or supplements. You can also call the Medicines Line on 1300 888 763 and speak to a pharmacist who can advise you about medication interactions.

Managing your epilepsy

It is vital that epilepsy be managed under the guidance of your GP and, where appropriate, a neurologist or paediatrician. Obtain clear instructions from your doctor on how and when to take your medication and what unwanted effects may occur. As general guidelines:

- ❖ Read the manufacturer's instructions.
- ❖ Take your medication as prescribed. Altering dosage or daily routine may provoke seizures and possibly a medical emergency.
- ❖ Know what medicines may interfere with your medication, including over the counter drugs.
- ❖ Know what to do if you miss taking your medication.
- ❖ Ensure that you maintain a continuous supply of medication especially when travelling.
- ❖ Store all tablets in original containers, clearly labelled and in a cool dry place out of reach of children.

- ⚡ Most people can enjoy moderate social drinking, but it is important to discuss with your doctor what effect alcohol may have on your medication and seizures.
- ⚡ To avoid missing doses take your medication at a regular time. If you are taking several medications, take them all at the same time - once, twice or three times a day as directed by your doctor.
- ⚡ Ensure you get adequate sleep.

This information is given to provide accurate, general information about epilepsy. Medical information and knowledge changes rapidly and you should consult your doctor for more detailed information. This is not medical advice and you should not make any medication or treatment changes without consulting your doctor.