

# MEDICATION MANAGEMENT OF EPILEPSY

FACT SHEET



# MEDICATION MANAGEMENT OF EPILEPSY

## Medications to control seizures are called anti-seizure medications (ASMs)

Antiseizure medications are used to control or reduce seizures. They do not cure epilepsy, but they can help many people live seizure-free or reduce how often seizures happen. Medication is usually the first treatment option for epilepsy.



### Choosing the right medication

Your neurologist will choose a medication based on:

- Your type of epilepsy (some medicines work better for certain types)
- Your age and gender
- Possible medication side effects or interactions with other medications
- Plans for pregnancy
- Your work, lifestyle, and other personal factors

#### Starting medication

Most people start with a low dose that is increased slowly over time – this is a necessary “start low, go slow” approach

Your response to the medication will be monitored closely. If seizures stop or lessen with minimal side effects, your dose may be kept the same. If it doesn't work well, another medication may be added or your treatment changed.

Some people try more than one medication before finding the right fit. In children, medication doses are worked out by body weight and as they grow, doses may need adjusting.



### How long will I need to take medication?

This varies for each person and depends on:

- Your type of epilepsy or epilepsy syndrome
- How well seizures are controlled
- How long you have been seizure-free
- The chance of seizures returning
- Medication side effects
- Other health conditions or medications you may have
- Social or lifestyle factors (e.g., driving, work)

Some people will take medication for life.

Others may experience seizure remission, or the seizures may resolve as they get older if it's an age-related epilepsy.



**! Many people with epilepsy gain seizure control with one medication. For some, more than one medication will be needed.**

# MEDICATION

## Stopping medication

Any withdrawal from anti-seizure medication should be done slowly and always under the advice and supervision of the prescribing doctor.

Suddenly stopping medication can provoke a seizure and possibly a medical emergency



## Unwanted medication effects

Unwanted effects or side-effects, often occur when starting a medication. They should lessen or disappear after the first few weeks of treatment, but you should inform your doctor if the side-effects persist, are intolerable or are listed as serious. In these cases, the medication dose may be lowered or withdrawn, and the unwanted symptoms will usually resolve.

Some ASMs can reduce the effectiveness of hormonal contraceptives, and some hormonal contraceptives can affect the uptake and absorption of some ASMs. This may mean that the type or dose of a contraception may need to be changed.

Some ASMs are known to have a higher risk of causing birth defects, so women planning a pregnancy should plan well ahead and discuss medication choice with the neurologist.

All known unwanted effects are listed in the manufacturer's product information sheets. Ask your pharmacist for one or search the TGA [here](#).

Some common unwanted side effects of ASM's include:

- Poor coordination and balance, dizziness and unsteadiness
- Poor concentration, brain fog
- Drowsiness, fatigue
- Visual problems – blurred or double vision
- Speech problems
- Stomach upsets - nausea, vomiting
- Weight gain or loss
- Mood changes



## Medication blood level monitoring

If someone has good seizure control with few or no medication side effects, blood level monitoring is not usually necessary. There are some situations where it is needed such as when someone is:

- taking phenytoin (Dilantin)
- having more seizures than usual or changes in seizures or seizure control
- taking many medications, or have another medical condition that requires monitoring
- a young child, elderly or disabled
- having what are thought to be unwanted side-effects

**!** **Ask your doctor or pharmacist about medication side effects or call Medicines Line 1300 888 763**

# MEDICATION

## Taking antiseizure medication regularly as prescribed is crucial. Changing doses or brands may provoke unwanted effects and seizures

There are many different names for the same medication. Once your seizures are controlled with a medication it is important to avoid changing brands as there is a small risk of “breakthrough” seizures for some people.

If you have a medication that works, do not change brands.



### Missing doses

Missing a dose is a common cause of breakthrough seizures.

Missed medication can trigger seizures in people with both well-controlled and poorly controlled epilepsy.

What to do if you forget a dose:

Speak to your neurologist when first starting a medication. There may be varying instructions for different medications

In general, if someone takes medication morning and night and the morning dose is forgotten – if its lunchtime or earlier take the forgotten dose as soon as possible. If it's after

lunchtime and getting too close to the evening dose it's better to omit the morning dose and just take the evening dose.

For once-daily medication, the forgotten dose should be taken as soon as you remember it. It is also important that if a dose is missed, not to take twice as much the next time because a larger than normal dose could cause side-effects.

For more information about what to do if you miss a dose, see Dr Dan McLaughlin discuss it [here](#).

### Other medications

Medications are known to interact (mix) with each other, including ASM's and medications for other health conditions, over-the-counter drugs, illicit drugs and complementary therapies.

Always ask your prescribing doctor or pharmacist about any possible interactions with medications, complementary therapies or supplements.

You can also call the Medicines Line on 1300 888 763 who can advise you about medication interactions.

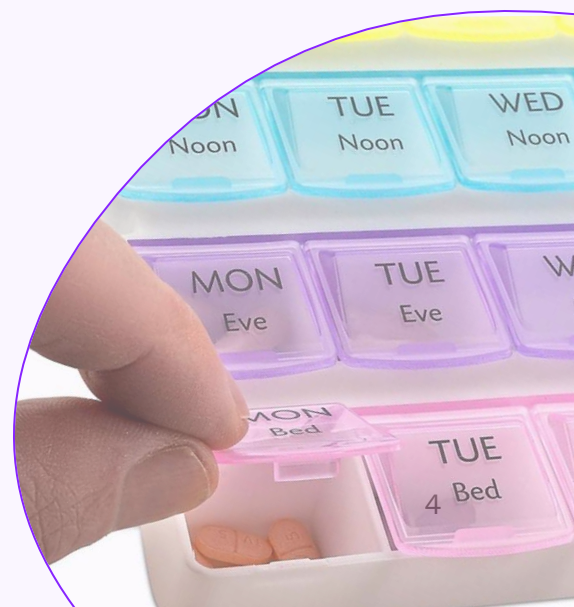
### Have a look at:

[Switching Brands Factsheet](#)

[Things you probably didn't know about medications](#)

[Managing Epilepsy](#)

[Self Management Factsheet](#)



# SUMMARY


## Some important tips:

- Follow instructions – Read the information that comes with your medication and take it exactly as your doctor prescribes.
- Don't change doses yourself – Changing how much or how often you take your medication can trigger seizures and, in some cases, a seizure emergency.
- Know what to do if you miss a dose – Your doctor or pharmacist can give you a plan for this.
- Stick to one brand – Switching brands can affect how your medicine works.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any new medicine, supplement, or herbal remedy.
- Take it at the same times each day – This helps you remember and keeps your medication levels steady.
- Keep a medication list – Write down the name, dose, and time you take each medicine. This is especially useful if you go to hospital, so there are no delays or mistakes in getting your medication.
- Store safely – Keep medication in its original labelled container, in a cool, dry place, and out of reach of children.
- Be aware of alcohol and contraception effects – Ask your doctor how your medication may be affected by alcohol, or how it may affect contraception.

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## What you can also do to help control seizures

Just taking medication is not always enough to control seizures. It is important to be aware of other things that may help with seizure control. These include:

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- avoiding known seizure triggers such as sleep deprivation and stress
  - keeping healthy by eating a balanced diet and exercising regularly
  - having regular check-ups or speak to your doctor if unwell or having unwanted symptoms
  - keeping a seizure diary to identify patterns

**Visit our website**



Contact us on:

Phone: 1300 37 45 37

Email: [epilepsy@epilepsy.org.au](mailto:epilepsy@epilepsy.org.au)

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Disclaimer: 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.