

Medication in chronic pain

The benefit from taking medication should always be more than any side effects you may have. Only you

- know how bad your pain is
- are able to say if your medicine is helping
- know what side effects you are having

It may take a few weeks or several trials of different medications to find the best combination for you and your pain. It may help to keep a diary of your pain and other symptoms. Side effects often become less once you have been on a medicine for a few days.

Please read the patient information sheet given with each medication. It gives more information about the medicine and any side effects.

You can discuss your pain medication with your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist. They can give you –

- Advice on which pain medicines may help.
- Help you find the best way to take your medicines.
- Advise you on increasing your dose safely if your pain is worse and on taking less medication safely when your pain is more settled.

If your medicine is not helping or if the risks outweigh the benefits, it may be sensible to reduce and stop taking it. Please talk to your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist first. Some pain medicines should not be stopped suddenly.

Do not share or take other peoples medication. Always advise your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist about any other medication or products you are taking for chronic pain. This includes anything bought from the pharmacy, herbal supplements or other medicines that aren't prescribed for you.

Understanding how your medications work may help you to get the best pain relief from it with the least side-effects.

FIFE PAIN MEDICINES PATIENT SAFETY PROGRAMME



Gabapentin

Patient Information Leaflet

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NHS Fife SMS text service number **07805800005** is available for people who have a hearing or speech impairment.

To find out more about accessible formats contact:
fife-UHB.EqualityandHumanRights@nhs.net
or phone **01592 729130**

Gabapentin

Gabapentin is a medication which can help to manage neuropathic (nerve) pain. It is not recommended for pain that is not neuropathic. It is also used to treat epilepsy.

Neuropathic pain is caused by sensitive, damaged or malfunctioning nerves. It is described as burning, shooting, electric shocks or pins and needles. The pain can be there all the time or it can come and go.

Medication alone will not cure the pain. It cannot be predicted which patients with neuropathic pain will benefit from gabapentin or who may experience side effects. You should understand the possible benefits and risks before deciding to trial treatment.

The goal of treatment is to reduce pain to improve function and quality of life. This means being able to do things that are important to you or something that pain stopped you from doing. The medication should be stopped gradually if it is not helping.

Gabapentin is a controlled drug, due to the potential for misuse and harm. This means it has extra regulations and prescriptions are limited to 30 days.

How to take gabapentin

The dose of gabapentin varies. A lower dose is recommended in older people, those who have problems with their breathing or kidneys and when prescribed alongside certain other medicines.

It should be taken regularly as prescribed. The dose is increased slowly to help avoid side effects. Most people will increase the number of capsules taken each week until they reach their target dose. It can take several weeks to get the full benefit.

How long should I take gabapentin for?

Review is necessary to assess the benefit and risks and decide on continued treatment. When starting this should be every few weeks or months. With ongoing use review is recommended every 6–12 months.

Do not stop gabapentin suddenly as this may cause withdrawal symptoms. Reducing the dose slowly will help stop this happening. Your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist can advise.

Are there any side effects?

All medications can cause side effects. The patient information sheet supplied with your prescription has more information.

The most common side effects are drowsiness, dizziness, muscle fatigue and tremor. These usually resolve after a few days.

If gabapentin makes you feel drowsy you should avoid driving or operating machinery. This might be worse when you start the medication or increase the dose. Alcohol can increase side effects and should be avoided. It is a criminal offence to drive a vehicle whilst unsafe.

Less common side effects are visual disturbance, appetite or weight changes, memory problems, mood changes or hallucinations and rash. If you experience side effects contact your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist for advice.

If you experience any trouble with your breathing or are taking shallow breaths, you should seek urgent medical help.

Additional information

Gabapentin can cause dependence. This is more likely if people have had dependency issues with other drugs or alcohol. Tolerance can also occur. This means that the benefit you initially got from gabapentin is not sustained. Your doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist can discuss any concerns.

Gabapentin should be avoided in pregnancy unless the benefit clearly outweighs any risk. It is recommended to use effective contraception while taking gabapentin. Let your doctor know if you are planning a pregnancy or become pregnant during treatment.

Weekly method of increasing the dose of gabapentin

Increase the number of capsules taken as shown below.

Do not take more than prescribed.

If you get side effects, stick with the dose you are on, do not continue to increase the dose.

Week	Capsule Strength	Number of capsules			Total daily dose
		8am	2pm	10pm	
1	300mg	0	0	1	300mg
2	300mg	1	0	1	600mg
3	300mg	1	1	1	900mg
Review recommended before further increase					
4	300mg	1	1	2	1200mg
5	300mg	2	1	2	1500mg
6	300mg	2	2	2	1800mg
Continue on this dose.					
Review required.					
Do not increase the dose further before discussion and agreement with the doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist					

Faster method of increase the dose of gabapentin

Increase the number of capsules taken as shown below.

Do not take more than prescribed.

If you get side effects do not increase as quickly. Try only increasing the dose each week instead.

Day	Capsule Strength	Number of capsules			Total daily dose
		8am	2pm	10pm	
1	300mg	0	0	1	300mg
2	300mg	1	0	1	600mg
3-7	300mg	1	1	1	900mg
Review recommended before further increase					
8	300mg	1	1	2	1200mg
9	300mg	2	1	2	1500mg
10-14	300mg	2	2	2	1800mg
Continue on this dose.					
Review required.					
Do not increase the dose further before discussion and agreement with the doctor, pharmacist or pain specialist					