Pain service

Gabapentin for pain management
Frequently asked questions

What is Gabapentin for?
Gabapentin is a medication that can help improve pain that arises from abnormal nerves. Nerve pain often has an unpleasant burning or shooting quality. Gabapentin can make such sensations easier to bear. Gabapentin may also be combined with other medications to control your pain.

Isn’t Gabapentin used for treating epilepsy?
Yes, Gabapentin is sometimes used to treat epilepsy but you have been prescribed it for nerve pain.

Are there any side effects?
All medicines can cause side effects. However, side effects from medicines do not affect everyone the same way. Some patients do not notice any side effects while others cannot tolerate side effects. Most patients who start to take Gabapentin report feeling drowsy or dizzy. Some patients experience nausea, constipation or diarrhoea after taking Gabapentin. These side effects should improve a few days after taking Gabapentin at the same dose.

You may find a pharmaceutical information sheet supplied with Gabapentin tablets. The sheet lists every single side effect that has been reported by patients taking Gabapentin. You are unlikely to experience most of them.

Please speak to your prescriber if you have any concerns about side effects or need help with them.

How should I start taking Gabapentin?
Gabapentin is usually started at a small dose, which is slowly increased. This reduces the chances of side effects occurring. The right dose of Gabapentin is the dose that controls your pain. There may be side effects at that dose but they should be mild enough for you to cope with.

You should start taking your Gabapentin as shown in the chart below. The chart shows the amount of gabapentin you need to take in milligrams (mg). Please speak to your prescriber or pharmacist if you are not sure how many tablets you need to take.

You can increase the dose of gabapentin to help with pain as long as the side effects are mild enough. If increasing the Gabapentin dose causes side effects you cannot tolerate, simply drop back to the lower dose. Most patients report benefits on pain at
doses between 300 to 600mg three times daily. Not all patients benefit from taking gabapentin. Please speak to your doctor or prescriber if you feel that gabapentin is not working well for you. They can help you decide whether it is worthwhile continuing with the medication.

Gabapentin capsules can be swallowed with water. It can be taken with meals or between meals. If you are taking any indigestion remedies (antacids) containing magnesium or aluminium, leave two hours between taking these and your capsules.

### Dose [milligrams]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY/ WEEK</th>
<th>Morning</th>
<th>Noon</th>
<th>Evening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delete as required</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What should I do if I forget to take a dose?**

You should take a missed dose as soon as you remember. However, if it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and take your medication as normal. Do not try to ‘double up’ to make up for your missed dose.

**Can I drink alcohol whilst taking Gabapentin?**

If the Gabapentin makes you feel tired or gives you other side effects, then drinking alcohol may increase these side effects. Because of this, we advise you to avoid drinking alcohol if these side effects are troublesome.

**Is it safe for me to drive whilst I’m taking Gabapentin?**

Gabapentin may cause drowsiness. This usually happens when the dose is being increased. If you feel affected by this, we advise that you should not drive until the dose is stable for two to three days or when effects become more tolerable with time.

**How long should I take gabapentin for?**

It may take up to four to eight weeks to find out whether Gabapentin is suitable for you. After that you can continue to take gabapentin provided its benefits for your pain...
outweighs any side effects you experience. The dose of gabapentin may need to be adjusted again depending on your level of pain.

If you are unsure, please speak to your prescriber. **Do not stop taking gabapentin suddenly without getting advice from your doctor.** Withdrawal symptoms from gabapentin are unusual but they can happen if the dose is very high or has been taken for a long time.

**Remember**

Never give your prescribed tablets to other people as they may not be safe for them to take. Any leftover tablets should be taken to your local pharmacy for safe disposal.

**Keep all medicines out of reach of children**

**Additional information**

The information in this leaflet is not intended to replace the advice given to you by your doctor or the pain service looking after you. If you require more information or have any questions, please speak to your GP or contact the pain clinic.

Telephone number: 01223 217796

---

We are now a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site.
For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

**Other formats:**

If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio, please ask the department where you are being treated, to contact the patient information team: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk.

Please note: We do not currently hold many leaflets in other languages; written translation requests are funded and agreed by the department who has authored the leaflet.

**Document history**

Authors: Pain Service (Lead authors: Dr Michael Lee/ Ms Claire Ross)
Department: Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 0QQ [www.cuh.org.uk](http://www.cuh.org.uk)
Contact number: 01223 217796
Publish/Review date: November 2014/November 2017
File name: PIN1292_Gabapentin_pain_management_FAQs_V5
Version number/Ref: V5/PIN1292