Carbamazepine drug information

Drug brand names
- Carbamazepine – various manufacturers
- Tegretol
- Carbagen SR

Switching between formulations
It is recommended that once you are prescribed a particular brand or manufacturer’s version of carbamazepine you should continue to take that particular preparation. Switching of brands or manufacturers should only be done under supervision of your doctor or epilepsy specialist.

Formulation
Carbamazepine is available as:
- 200mg and 400mg prolonged release tablets
- 100mg, 200mg and 400mg standard release tablets
- 100mg/5ml oral solution
- 100mg and 200mg chewable tablets
- 125mg and 250mg suppositories

Uses
Carbamazepine is an antiepileptic drug is used widely to reduce frequency and severity of epilepsy seizures. It can help in a variety of seizure types, including focal (partial) seizures and generalised tonic-clonic seizures. It can be used alone or alongside other antiepileptic medication.

Carbamazepine may also be used to treat some types of pain, or be prescribed for bipolar disorder; it is also rarely used in alcohol withdrawal.

Side effects (the list of side effects is not exhaustive, please refer to product literature for full list)
Carbamazepine is generally well tolerated. In our experience about half of patients will have some side effects; these are often mild and temporary.

Dose-related side effects become more likely the higher the dose of medication and improve if the dose is reduced again. They sometimes occur temporarily when the medication is started or as the dose is increased.

Common side effects include:
- Sleepiness and lethargy
- Unsteadiness when walking
• Dizziness and double vision
• Nausea and vomiting
• Dry mouth
• Double vision or blurred vision and headache
• All antiepileptic medication can cause feelings of depression, or severe mood changes. If you experience any of these please contact your specialist.

• Rarely some patients will experience an allergic rash; it can look like sunburn or may be a milder skin irritation. Consult your doctor as soon as possible if this happens.

• Medically serious side effects are very rare but may affect the blood or the liver. Blood tests will be performed where appropriate. If you experience any of the follow side effects seek immediate medical attention:
  o Confusion
  o Muscle twitching
  o Fever
  o Rash and/or blistering
  o Mouth ulcers or sore throat
  o Bruising or bleeding
  o Unusual lethargy

In the event of any of these side effects, contact the epilepsy nurse (contact details are at the end of the leaflet), and/or your GP.

Persons identified to be of Han Chinese, Thai (south east Asian origin) are at increased risk of skin rash and would require a specific blood test prior to starting treatment.

Your doctor will do some blood tests before starting treatment and may repeat these during treatment with carbamazepine. These tests will monitor the blood, sodium levels and liver function.

Carbamazepine should not be prescribed in certain groups of patients with heart or kidney problems.

**Contraception**

Carbamazepine reduces the amount of the oral contraceptive pill in your body. Therefore a higher dose pill is required. Even then, contraception may be slightly less effective, especially if there is breakthrough bleeding between periods. You should consider also using a barrier method until this problem is resolved. Carbamazepine does not affect the three month contraceptive injections or the hormone coil.
Pregnancy and breastfeeding
If you are taking any anti-epileptic drug, you should ask to see your specialist and discuss the best preparations and doses before you conceive in order to reduce the risk of malformations to your baby. Once you are already pregnant it is too late to make these changes. The risks to your baby from carbamazepine include spina bifida, facial, heart and urinary tract malformations. This may be reduced by taking 5mg folic acid supplements daily from at least twelve weeks prior to conception until the end of week 12 of pregnancy. Other risks include delay in mental development of your baby.

Carbamazepine may be used in breast feeding, however the baby must be monitored closely, particularly for increased drowsiness and skin reactions. Please seek specialist advice if you wish to take carbamazepine whilst breastfeeding.

Drug interactions
Medications such as paracetamol and aspirin can be given with carbamazepine. Always remind your doctor or pharmacist that you take carbamazepine when new medication is discussed or started. Carbamazepine can alter levels of a variety of medication; also other medication could alter the effectiveness of carbamazepine.

Other useful information
- You can take carbamazepine at the same time as you take other medication. The medication can be taken with or without food. Do not stop taking your medication suddenly and without consultation with your doctor.
- Keep a record of your seizures when you start any new medication. This will help to determine future drug dosages.
- Store carbamazepine in the packaging that it comes in and in the conditions specified on the patient information leaflet.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember but do not take two doses at the same time or within six hours of each other.

Contact details
If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the epilepsy nurse specialist on 01223 217992.

The information on this leaflet is not exhaustive. Please refer to the patient information leaflet prepared by the manufacturer of your drug which can be found in the medicine packaging.
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
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