



## Valproate (also called Sodium Valproate, Valproic Acid, Epilim)

Valproate is a medicine used in epilepsy to control a number of different seizures or convulsions (fits): absences, generalised tonic-clonic seizures, myoclonic seizures (jerks), atonic seizures, infantile spasms, partial seizures. It is also used to treat chronic pain, e.g. migraine.

### The medicine is available in:

- liquid or syrup (cherry-flavoured) consisting of 200 mg per teaspoon (5 ml)
- coated tablets (200 mg or 500 mg)
- crushable tablet (100 mg).
- There is also a tablet called Epilim Chrono which is purple coloured and is available in strengths of 200 mg, 300 mg, and 500 mg. This tablet releases the Valproate more slowly into the blood stream after it has been swallowed.

### How do I use it?

- Valproate is usually given twice a day.
- If your child takes the liquid form you should use either a measuring teaspoon or syringe to ensure that your child receives the correct amount.
- The coated tablets should not be chewed as they taste bitter. They may be taken with water, fruit juice or milk.
- Epilim Chrono should be swallowed whole and **not** chewed
- If a dose is forgotten and you remember up to four hours after missing the dose, give the forgotten dose when you can.
- If you remember only at or near the time the next dose is due, just give your child the usual dose. **Do not** give any extra Valproate.
- If your child vomits within 15 minutes of taking a dose of the medicine then give the dose again; if your child vomits after 15 minutes of taking the dose, then **do not** give it again.

The medicine is at the correct dosage when your child is free of seizures or convulsions (fits) and has no side effects. It is rarely

necessary to measure the level of the medicine in the blood.

Keep a seizure diary if you can and remember to always bring all the medicines with you to clinic appointments.

### Use with other medicines?

Paracetamol (Calpol), antibiotics and most other over-the-counter medicines can be safely taken with Valproate. Valproate does not reduce the effectiveness of the oral contraceptive pill. Valproate can increase the blood levels of another antiepileptic drug called Lamotrigine, your doctor will advise you about this if needs be.

### What are the common side-effects?

Although there are a large number of possible side effects, they are uncommon and most are minor:

1. An initial loss of appetite, nausea or vomiting are fairly common but settle down after a week or so. These problems may be avoided by starting with a small dose with food and gradually increasing the dosage given. If stomach-ache or vomiting does not go away, you should contact your doctor or specialist nurse.
2. Drowsiness and a change in behaviour occur rarely. If they do not go away, you should contact your doctor or specialist nurse
3. An increase in appetite is quite common, in teenagers. If excessive weight gain becomes a problem, it can usually be treated with a diet or the Valproate dose may have to be slowly reduced.
4. Some hair loss may be seen rarely. Once the Valproate is stopped, the hair almost always grows back but may be more curly than previously.
5. A fine tremor or shakiness of the hands may be seen rarely, at a high dose and disappears following a reduction in dosage.
6. Occasionally, Sodium Valproate causes a reduction in the blood

platelets, which help the blood to clot after cuts. This rarely causes a problem, but if your child does develop unexplained bruising or bleeding, you should contact your doctor who can arrange a blood test.

7. A very small number of children have developed pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas). If your child develops severe stomach pains or vomiting or both, see your doctor **immediately**.
8. Rarely children have developed liver disease. This is usually within the first six months of treatment. This may not be due to the Valproate itself. The problem nearly always occurs in children under the age of 2 years, who have a developmental delay, have very frequent and severe fits and are taking Valproate **and** other anticonvulsant (anti-epileptic) medicines. If your child develops repeated vomiting, sleepiness yellow jaundice or an increasing number of convulsions or fits you must see your doctor **immediately**.
9. Women who are or may become pregnant on Valproate should get urgent advice from the doctor or specialist nurse. Although most babies seem OK, 10 -15% of babies born to mothers on Valproate have a major malformation e.g. spina bifida. This is twice the risk of most antiepileptic drugs. Also there is a risk that it may lower the baby's learning and developmental abilities leading to learning difficulties in later life.

Despite this long list of side effects, Valproate is a very effective anti-epileptic (anticonvulsant) medicine and has very little effect on the child's level of alertness, behaviour and learning abilities.

For further information please see the manufacturer's information leaflet.