

Gabapentin (Neurontin®)

Why is this medication prescribed?

- To treat pain from damaged nerves (neuropathic pain). Gabapentin works by dampening the pain signals sent through the body's nervous system.
- Gabapentin can also be used in the treatment of seizure disorders.

How should this medication be used?

- Gabapentin comes as a capsule in the following strengths: 100 mg, 300 mg, and 400 mg. *(It also comes as a 600 mg and 800 mg tablet, but the tablet form is not covered by the Ontario government drug plan).*
- It is typically taken by mouth 3 times a day, at the same time each day. To minimize side effects, your doctor will prescribe gabapentin at a low dose and increase the dose slowly. Examples of gabapentin dosing schedules are below.

Example A (using gabapentin 100mg capsules)

Day	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
1	-----	-----	100 mg
2	-----	100 mg	100 mg
3	-----	100 mg	100 mg
4	100 mg	100 mg	100 mg
5	100 mg	100 mg	100 mg
6	100 mg	100 mg	100 mg
7	100 mg	-----	300 mg
8	100 mg	-----	300 mg
9	100 mg	100 mg	300 mg
10	100 mg	100 mg	300 mg
11	100 mg	100 mg	300 mg
12	100 mg	200 mg	300 mg
13	100 mg	200 mg	300 mg
14	100 mg	200 mg	300 mg
15	200 mg	200 mg	300 mg
16	200 mg	200 mg	300 mg
17	200 mg	200 mg	300 mg
18	200 mg	300 mg	300 mg
19	200 mg	300 mg	300 mg
20	200 mg	300 mg	300 mg
21	300 mg	300 mg	300 mg

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Example B (using gabapentin 300mg capsules)**Week 1:** 1 capsule at bedtime**Week 2:** 1 capsule in the morning and 1 capsule at bedtime**Week 3:** 1 capsule in the morning, 1 capsule in the afternoon, and 1 capsule at bedtime

The usual target dose for pain management is approximately 1800 mg/day (e.g., 600 mg three times a day). The maximum dose of gabapentin is 3600 mg/day.

- Gabapentin may be taken with or without food.
- Gabapentin is **NOT** a "pain killer" to be taken whenever pain becomes severe or for managing minor aches and pains. Gabapentin should be **taken on a consistent basis**, according to your doctor's orders to help you control long-term pain.
- Do **NOT** abruptly stop taking gabapentin without talking to your doctor. Sudden stopping of this medication can cause pain, poor sleep, anxiety or sweating. Abruptly stopping gabapentin may also result in seizures. If for some reason gabapentin is no longer needed, your doctor will reduce your dose gradually.

When does this medication start to work?

It may take a month to notice the pain-relieving effect of gabapentin. When slow dose increases are made for tolerability purposes, it may take longer to reach the target dose and achieve pain relief/functional improvement.

What is the risk of drug interactions with gabapentin?

Gabapentin has a low chance of causing drug interactions. There may be an additive effect when it is taken with other medications that cause drowsiness or dizziness (e.g., opioids or benzodiazepines). Co-administration of aluminum or magnesium-based antacids is **NOT** recommended due to a potential decrease in gabapentin absorption. If you take aluminum or magnesium-based antacids, take your gabapentin dose 2 hours after the antacid dose.

What special precautions should I follow?

- Before using gabapentin talk to your doctor if you have any of the following health issues:
 - Kidney disease (Gabapentin is cleared from the body by the kidneys. If you have kidney problems, lower doses of gabapentin will be used.)
 - Congestive heart failure
 - Are pregnant or breastfeeding or this situation is likely in the near future
- When gabapentin is first tried, it is best to wait until your body adjusts to this new medication or a dose change before driving or operating machinery.
- Excessive drowsiness and impaired coordination can occur if gabapentin is taken with alcohol. It is best to avoid alcohol while taking gabapentin.

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What should I do if I forget a dose?

- Take the missed dose as soon as you remember it unless it is almost time for the next dose. In this case, skip the missed dose and continue your regular dosing schedule.
- Do **NOT** take a double dose to make up for a missed dose.

What side effects can this medication cause?

All medicines can cause side effects, which may range from mild to severe. The most common side effects of gabapentin are:

- Drowsiness → Taking the first dose at night is preferred.
- Dizziness
- Dry mouth → use sugarfree gum/lozenges or Biotene® mouth rinses to help reduce this
- Swelling of the feet or lower legs
- Weight gain
- Blurred vision
- Difficulty with concentration/attention

Inform your doctor **immediately** if you notice:

- Changes in coordination (e.g., clumsiness or falls)
- New difficulties with mood or worsening mood, behavioural or emotional changes, or have thoughts of self-harm when taking gabapentin

Remember that your doctor has prescribed this medication because he or she has judged that the benefit to you is greater than the risk of side effects. Many people using this medication do not have serious side effects.

How should I store this medication?

- Keep this medication in the container it came in, tightly closed, and out of reach of children.
- Store at room temperature, away from excess heat/moisture (not in the kitchen or bathroom).
- If at any point in the future gabapentin is stopped by your doctor, return any remaining supply to your community pharmacist for proper medication disposal.