

Depakote® (Valproic Acid)

What is Depakote®/ Valproic Acid?

Depakote is an anti-epileptic drug that has been used to treat patients with epilepsy since 1983. It is helpful in the treatment of Partial Seizures, Absence Seizures and Generalized Tonic-Clonic Seizures.

Starting the Medicine:

We usually gradually increase the dose, until your body gets adjusted to the medication. Since each patient is unique in that he/she breaks down the medication differently or may need a higher or lower dosage to control their seizures, there is no standard dose that is appropriate for all patients. Sprinkles can be sprinkled on the food or swallowed as a whole capsule. They cannot be chewed.

What is the dosage of the pill and what does it look like?

Sprinkle: 125 mg white opaque and blue soft capsule

Tablets: 125 mg pink color

250 mg peach color

500 mg lavender color

Liquid: 250 mg per 5cc

What side effects can be caused by Depakote®?

Side Effects can be dose related (common) or Idiosyncratic (rare):

Common or Dose-Related Side Effects:

Nausea, vomiting, indigestion, anorexia, weight loss or weight gain, sedation, unsteady gait, tremor, hair loss, photosensitivity, and irregular menses may occur.

Gastro intestinal irritation can be reduced by taking the medication with food. If other side effects such as tremor, weight gain etc., become bothersome, notify your doctor because the dose may need to be decreased.

If this occurs, your doctor may:

- spread out the dose evenly throughout the day in four divided doses
- decrease the daily dose and increase the bedtime dose
- instruct you to take your pills with food since this will slow the rate at which the medicine gets into the blood, but will not affect the total amount that is absorbed.

Serious Side Effects:

Depakote may cause liver failure. Usually it occurs in children younger than 2 years old and in elderly patients and commonly in the first 6 months of the treatment. Symptoms may include weakness, lethargy, loss of appetite, swelling of the face, vomiting, jaundice (yellow skin), rash, and itching. If these symptoms occur, contact your doctor immediately.

Depakote can reduce the body's ability to manufacture certain blood cells which are important to fight infections and prevent bleeding. A reduction in these cells can cause fever, sore throat and ulcers in the mouth, or unusual bleeding and easy bruising. If these symptoms occur, contact your doctor immediately.

Skin Rash:

Skin rash can occur. Because rash can indicate a more serious medical condition, contact your doctor immediately if you develop a rash, fever, or swollen glands.

Pregnancy:

Women of child-bearing age should be aware that there is a small increase in risk for congenital malformations (fetal damage about 4-6% risk overall and a 1-2% risk of spina bifida), bleeding tendency in newborns and liver failure. This risk increases in women taking more than one anti-epileptic drug. Discuss this with your doctor.

How do I take this medication?

It is very important to take your medication regularly since a stable blood level helps to reduce seizures. Therefore, the medication does not work when taken on an as needed basis. It is usually prescribed in two to four evenly divided doses taken at regular times.

Can I Take Depakote with Other Medications?

Yes, Depakote may be taken with most medications. However, sleeping pills (benzodiazepines), alcohol, aspirin, and Coumadin® can increase side effects. Always tell your doctor what other medicines you are taking.

What Should I Do If I Miss a Dose?

If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. You may have to change your usual times taking Depakote when you are trying to make up the missing dose. If you have to “double up” on a dose, take that dose at bedtime.

Why is my blood checked for Depakote®?

The blood sample is a more accurate way to measure Depakote in your body than counting the number of pills that you take. This level is important in adjusting your daily dose.

It is preferred to have the Depakote level checked in the morning before you take your first dose so that your doctor can see what your level is at its lowest point in the day.

Why is my blood checked for a CBC with differential and SGOT?

Although Depakote rarely causes problems with blood cells or liver problems, we periodically like to check the CBC to count the number of white and red blood cells and platelets. We check the SGOT and SGPT which are indirect tests of liver function.

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