



## Medication following Brain Injury



## Medication following Brain Injury

Many people are prescribed medication after their brain injury for a number of different reasons. This leaflet is designed as a brief guide to some of the most common medications taken by people after their brain injury. The information in this leaflet is not exhaustive, and you should consult your doctor if you have any concerns about any medication you are taking. Listed below are some general guidelines to remember if you are taking any prescribed medication.

- Never stop taking your medication without consulting your doctor.
- Ask your doctor to explain any medication you are prescribed including any side effects.
- Always read and follow instructions carefully, if you are unsure ask your pharmacist for advice.
- If your medication makes you feel drowsy, **DO NOT DRIVE OR OPERATE MACHINERY**
- Always consult your doctor if you are pregnant or intend to become pregnant, as some medication requires special monitoring during pregnancy.

It is important to remember that all medications have a number of side effects that affect some people. Not everyone will experience side effects, and most people tolerate prescribed medications well. Your doctor should explain any medication they prescribe to you, including any common side effects. If you are worried or concerned about side effects of medication you have been prescribed you should consult your doctor or pharmacist.

Medication is classified into different groups. The groups discussed within this leaflet are:

- Antiepileptics
- Major tranquilisers
- Antidepressants

It is possible that you may be prescribed medication not referred to in this leaflet. If you require advice or information on any medication you are prescribed you should consult your doctor or local pharmacist.

### Anti-epileptic drugs

Some people do suffer from seizures after brain injury. Often these occur only in the early stages of your recovery but they can be a permanent consequence of your brain injury. Any medication you are prescribed to control seizures will depend on the type of seizures you have and the frequency with which you have them. It is also quite common to be prescribed more than one anticonvulsant medication to control seizures effectively.

Some anti-epileptic drugs are also prescribed to people who do not have seizures in order to help stabilise their mood.

## Some of the most commonly prescribed anti-epileptics:

### Carbamazepine

*Also known as: Tegretol, Tegretol Retard, Teril CR or Timonil Retard*

This frequently prescribed for control of various types of epilepsy (simple and complex partial seizures and for some types of tonic-clonic seizures). Most people tolerate carbamazepine well, however a small number of people can have a serious reaction that requires medical attention. Carbamazepine is also commonly used as a mood stabiliser. It can be taken as tablets, liquid or suppositories.

Side effects include:

Nausea and/or vomiting, Balance problems, Double vision.

*Seek IMMEDIATE medical attention if any of the following symptoms occur:*

Fever, Sore throat, Rash, Mouth ulcers, Bruising, Bleeding.

### Lamotrigine

*Also known as: Lamictal*

Can be used in the control of partial and generalised seizures. It can be prescribed on its own or in addition to other anticonvulsant drugs. Lamotrigine is available in tablets and dispersible tablets.

Common side effects include:

Blurred vision, Drowsiness, Balance problems, Sleep disturbance, Nausea and/or vomiting.

*Seek IMMEDIATE medical attention if any of the following symptoms occur:*

Rash, Flu-like symptoms.

### Sodium Valproate

*Also known as: Epilim, Epilim Chrono and Convulex*

Used in the treatment of tonic-clonic seizures. It can also be effective in the treatment of absence type seizures. Sodium Valproate is also used to stabilise mood. Sodium Valproate is available in tablet and liquid form.

Common side effects include:

Shakiness, Increased appetite, Loss of or thinning of hair, Nausea, Skin rashes.

*Seek IMMEDIATE medical attention if any of the following symptoms occur:*

Jaundice (Yellowish colour of the skin), Vomiting, Sore throat, Mouth ulcers, Bruising, Bleeding.

## Major Tranquillisers

These drugs are also known as neuroleptics or anti-psychotics. It is possible for some people to develop mental health problems after a brain injury. This may include psychotic symptoms such as hearing voices, feelings of paranoia or unusual ideas or beliefs. It is also common for people to become aggressive or agitated after a brain injury and your doctor may prescribe one of these drugs to help to manage these symptoms.

The list below contains some of the most commonly prescribed major tranquillisers. All prescribed major tranquillisers have some common side effects, although the ones listed below tend to have fewer of these than others. These common side effects can be treated by reducing the medication or in some cases, taking an additional medication to minimise the unpleasant side effects. It is important to remember not to stop taking your medication before talking to your doctor. If you experience any of the following side effects, consult your doctor to discuss your treatment.

Common side effects of major tranquillisers include:

Tremor, Abnormal face or body movements, Restlessness, Involuntary movements of tongue, face or jaw.

These are called Extra Pyramidal Side Effects (EPSE) and should be reported to your doctor as soon as possible.

### Olanzapine

*Also known as: Zyprexa*

This is a commonly used drug that is normally well tolerated by most people. It is not advisable if you suffer from diabetes. Olanzapine can be taken in tablet form and is also available as a tablet that dissolves in your mouth.

Side effects include:

Drowsiness, Dizziness, Increased appetite (and weight gain), Weakness, EPSE (See Above).

### Risperidone

*Also known as: Risperidal*

Risperidone is also well tolerated in most people. Risperidone is available in tablet and liquid form.

Side effects include:

Sleep disturbance, Headache, Nausea, Weight gain, Dizziness, Blurred vision, EPSE (See above).

## Antidepressants

It is very common for people to experience symptoms of depression following a brain injury. In some cases it may be appropriate to prescribe an antidepressant medication. It is also important to consider support and/or counselling if you have symptoms of depression. There are several different categories of antidepressant. This leaflet will describe the most commonly prescribed category, known as SSRI's (Selective Serotonin Re-uptake Inhibitors). This type of antidepressant can also be used to manage some types of anxiety disorders.

Common side effects of SSRI's include:

Nausea/vomiting, Tummy ache, Weight loss/gain, Appetite loss/gain, Dry mouth, Rash, Sleep disturbance.

### Citalopram

*Also known as: Cipramil.*

Available in tablets and oral drops.

Side effects include:

Yawning, Poor concentration, Coughing, Memory problems.

### Paroxetine

*Also known as: Seroxat*

Paroxetine can also be used in the treatment of anxiety disorders. Available in both tablet and liquid form.

Side effects include:

Postural hypotension (Blood pressure lowering when you stand up) .

### Fluoxetine

*Also known as: Prozac*

Fluoxetine is available in capsule or liquid form.

Side effects include:

Fever, Changes in blood sugar levels.

## Other useful sources of information about medication

**NHS Direct** - Telephone: 0845 4647 - Website: [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

**Patient UK** - Website: [www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)

**British National Formulary** - Website: [www.bnf.org](http://www.bnf.org)

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# *A European leader in traumatic brain injury rehabilitation*

**We offer Europe's leading rehabilitation programme to help people recover social independence following a brain injury.**

Our services are designed to meet the needs of people at different stages of rehabilitation - from assessment to comprehensive rehabilitation, long-term housing and care, and community-based support.

**The Brain Injury Rehabilitation Trust (BIRT)** is a leading European provider in specialist brain injury rehabilitation. We support people to regain lost skills and independence and rebuild their lives following acquired brain injury, caused typically by road accident, assault, stroke or disease.

We offer a range of services to meet the needs of people at different stages of rehabilitation - including assessment, intensive rehabilitation, continuing rehabilitation, and community-based support.

We currently support over 550 people with acquired brain injury, a figure which will rise substantially with several new service developments planned.

Our clinical expertise, combined with excellent facilities and a dedication to care, gives each individual the best possible chance of rehabilitation following an acquired brain injury. All our programmes follow our established 'neurobehavioural' approach.

BIRT is a division of The Disabilities Trust, which provides services to people with physical impairments, autism and learning disabilities, as well as brain injury.

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BIRT is part of The Disabilities Trust, Registered Charity No. 800797



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