

Sodium valproate and pregnancy



Important information for parents and carers

This leaflet has been written for parents and carers to explain the risks of becoming pregnant whilst taking valproate

It may be difficult to have conversations about sexual activity and contraception with your child; however, it is important that they understand the risks, so that they can make informed decisions. There is a similar leaflet specifically for girls and young women, which we recommend you share with your daughter:

www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk/sodium-valproate-and-pregnancy

- Please read this information carefully. Keep it somewhere safe so that you can read it again.
- Information about how to take sodium valproate can be found here: www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk/sodium-valproate-preventing-seizures

The facts

- Sodium valproate is highly effective for the treatment of epilepsy.
- However, taking sodium valproate during pregnancy carries a high risk of harm to the developing baby (2 out of 5 babies are affected).
- Contraception is therefore essential to protect against pregnancy.
- If your daughter thinks she might be pregnant, she should contact her doctor or nurse immediately but continue to take sodium valproate in the meantime to prevent seizures.
- Sodium valproate is also known as valproic acid and by the brand names Convulex, Epilim, Epilim Chrono, Epilim Chronosphere, Episenta, Epival and Orlept.

Why is important to avoid pregnancy while taking sodium valproate?



Sodium valproate can cause physical harm to a developing baby.

- The baby may develop spina bifida, in which the spine does not develop properly.
- The face and skull may not form properly, resulting in cleft lip and palate.
- The arms and legs, heart, kidneys, urinary tract and sex organs may not develop properly.



The baby may also have developmental problems after birth.

- Their development may be delayed, so that they walk or talk later than would be expected.
- They may have low intelligence, memory problems, or poor language skills, with difficulty in speaking and understanding.
- There is increased risk of childhood autism spectrum disorders and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Contraception

- It is vital that your daughter understands the importance of effective contraception. Your daughter can discuss this with your doctor, epilepsy team, or family planning services. She may prefer to have these conversations in private.
- She should tell any health professional that she is taking sodium valproate, to get the right advice.
- Even if your daughter doesn't have periods, she can still become pregnant so it is vital that she uses contraception.

Can my daughter take a different medicine?

- Several medicines are used to treat epilepsy of different types; however, some of these may also have harmful effects on developing babies.
- This should be discussed with your healthcare team.

Who to contact for more information

Your daughter's doctor, epilepsy nurse or pharmacist can provide information about sodium valproate and other medicines used to treat epilepsy.

You can also get useful information from:

England: NHS 111

Tel 111 – www.nhs.uk

Scotland: NHS 24

Tel 111 – www.nhs24.com

Wales: NHS 111 Wales

Tel 111

www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

Northern Ireland: NI Direct

www.nidirect.gov.uk

Young Epilepsy

01342 831 342

www.youngepilepsy.org.uk

Epilepsy Society

01494 601 400

www.epilepsysociety.org.uk

Epilepsy Action

0808 800 5050

www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk



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The primary source for the information in this leaflet is the British National Formulary for Children. For details on any other sources used for this leaflet, please contact us through our website, www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk. We take great care to make sure that the information in this leaflet is correct and up-to-date. However, medicines can be used in different ways for different patients. It is important that you ask the advice of your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure about something. This leaflet is about the use of these medicines in the UK, and may not apply to other countries. The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), the Neonatal and Paediatric Pharmacists Group (NPPG), WellChild and the contributors and editors cannot be held responsible for the accuracy of information, omissions of information, or any actions that may be taken as a consequence of reading this leaflet.