

# Medicines for Children: information for parents and carers

## Carbamazepine for preventing seizures



This leaflet is about the use of carbamazepine to prevent epileptic seizures. (Seizures may also be called convulsions or fits.)

This leaflet has been written specifically for parents and carers about the use of this medicine in children. The information may differ from that provided by the manufacturer. Please read this leaflet carefully. Keep it somewhere safe so that you can read it again.

**Do not stop giving carbamazepine suddenly, as your child may have more seizures.**

### Name of drug

**Carbamazepine**

**Common brands:** Tegretol®, Tegretol Retard®

### Why is it important for my child to take this medicine?

It is important that your child takes carbamazepine regularly so that they have fewer seizures.

### What is carbamazepine available as?

- white tablets (100 mg, 200 mg, 400 mg)
- beige–orange slow-release tablets (200 mg, 400 mg)
- orange ‘chewtabs’ (100 mg, 200 mg)
- liquid medicine (100 mg in 5 mL) (caramel-flavoured and sugar-free)

### When should I give carbamazepine?

You will usually give your child two doses each day: one in the morning and one in the evening. Ideally, these times are 10–12 hours apart, for example some time between 7 and 8 am, and between 7 and 8 pm.

### How much should I give?

Your doctor will work out the amount of carbamazepine (the dose) that is right for *your* child. The dose will be shown on the medicine label.

When you first start giving carbamazepine to your child, you will give them a small amount and then increase the dose bit by bit over a few days or weeks. This helps your child to get used to the medicine. Your doctor will explain what to do.

**⚠ It is important that you follow your doctor’s instructions about how much to give.**

### How should I give it?



**Tablets (white and beige–orange)** should be swallowed whole with a glass of water, milk or juice. Your child should not chew the tablets. Do not crush these tablets.



**Orange ‘chewtabs’** can be chewed. Ideally your child should drink a glass of water, milk or juice after swallowing the chewtabs.



**Liquid medicine:** Measure out the right amount using a medicine spoon or oral syringe. You can get these from your pharmacist. Do not use a kitchen teaspoon as it will not give the right amount.

### When should the medicine start working?

It may take a few weeks for carbamazepine to work properly, so your child may still have seizures for a while. This is because the amount of medicine has to be increased slowly.

Continue to give the medicine as you have been told to by your doctor. Carbamazepine may not stop your child’s seizures completely.

### What if my child is sick (vomits)?

- If your child is sick less than 30 minutes after taking a dose of carbamazepine, give the same dose again.
- If your child is sick more than 30 minutes after taking a dose of carbamazepine, you **do not** need to give them another dose. Wait until the next normal dose.

### What if I forget to give it?

- If you remember up to 4 hours after you should have given a dose, give your child the missed dose. For example, if you usually give a dose at 7 am, you can give the missed dose at any time up to 11 am.
  - If you remember after that time, **do not** give the missed dose. Wait until it is time to give the next normal dose.
- ⚠** Never give a ‘double’ dose of carbamazepine.

### What if I give too much?

**⚠** If you think you may have given your child too much carbamazepine, contact your doctor or NHS Direct (0845 4647) or take your child to hospital.

Take the medicine container or pack with you, even if it is empty. This will be useful to the doctor. Have the packet with you if you telephone for advice.

### Are there any possible side-effects?

We use medicines to make our children better, but sometimes they cause effects that we don’t want (side-effects).

### Side-effects that you must do something about

- ⚠** If your child develops a blotchy red skin rash, **tell your doctor straight away**, as your child may be allergic to carbamazepine. The rash may be anywhere on the body, and you may also see blisters in the mouth.
- ☎ 999** If your child develops such a rash and is also generally unwell and has a fever (high temperature), **take them to your doctor or hospital straight away**, as this may indicate a more serious reaction.
- ⚠** Carbamazepine occasionally affects the blood. If your child seems to be getting more infections than usual (e.g. bad colds, chest or skin infections, stomach upsets), or they seem to bruise more easily, or bleeding doesn’t stop quickly, contact your doctor **straight away**.

### Other side-effects you need to know about

- Your child may be drowsy (sleepy), unsteady, dizzy, have blurred or double vision, or may get a tremor (shakiness)

when they first start taking carbamazepine, or they may feel sick or be sick (vomit). These side-effects should get better within about 2 weeks. If they don't, contact your doctor.

### Can other common medicines be given at the same time as carbamazepine?

- You can give your child medicines that contain paracetamol or ibuprofen, unless your doctor has told you not to.
- Carbamazepine should not be taken with some common drugs that you get on prescription. It is important to tell your doctor *and* pharmacist that your child is taking carbamazepine.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist **before** giving any other medicines to your child. This includes herbal or complementary medicines.

### Epilepsy and pregnancy

- Pregnancy presents a risk to both the mother with epilepsy and her unborn baby. If your daughter has sex, it is essential that she uses adequate contraception to prevent an unplanned pregnancy.
- If your daughter is worried that she may be pregnant, it is important that she sees your family doctor as early as possible. Your daughter should keep taking her medication until she sees her doctor.

### Carbamazepine and pregnancy

- Carbamazepine may harm an unborn baby.
- The oral contraceptive pill does not work properly in women or girls who are taking carbamazepine.

### Is there anything else I need to know about carbamazepine?

- Carbamazepine can make some types of epilepsy worse (absence seizures and myoclonic seizures). If you think your child's seizures are becoming worse, contact your doctor or epilepsy nurse.

### General advice about medicines for seizures

- ⚠ **Do not** suddenly stop giving any of these medicines to your child, as they may have a seizure. If you are worried, talk to your doctor but carry on giving the medicine to your child as usual.
- ⚠ If your child seems to have more seizures than usual, contact your doctor or epilepsy nurse.

- If your doctor decides to stop a particular medicine, they will discuss this with you. You will usually reduce the dose bit by bit.

- ⚠ **Do not** change the dose of any drug without talking to your doctor first.
- It is best that your child always has the same brand of each medicine, as there may be differences between brands. Keep a record of which medicines your child has.
- Try to give medicines at about the same times every day, to help you remember.
- Only give the medicine(s) to *your* child. Never give them to anyone else, even if their condition appears to be the same, as this could do harm.
- ⚠ If you think someone else may have taken the medicine by accident, contact your doctor straight away.
- Make sure that you always have enough medicine. Order a new prescription at least 2 weeks before you will run out.
- Make sure that the medicines you have at home have not reached the 'best before' or 'use by' date on the packaging. Give old medicines to your pharmacist to dispose of.

### Where should I keep this medicine?

- Keep the medicine in a cupboard, away from heat and direct sunlight.
- Make sure that children cannot see or reach the medicine.
- Keep the medicine in the container it came in.

### Who to contact for more information

Your child's doctor, epilepsy nurse or pharmacist will be able to give you more information about carbamazepine and other medicines used to treat epilepsy.

You can also get useful information from these organisations.

**Epilepsy Action**  
www.epilepsy.org.uk  
helpline 0808 800 5050

**NHS Direct**  
www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk  
0845 4647

**National Society for Epilepsy**  
www.epilepsynse.org.uk  
helpline 01494 601 300

[www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk](http://www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk)



Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

**WellChild**  
the national charity for sick children

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We have written this leaflet to help you understand more about the medicine you are giving to your child. We take great care to make sure that the information is correct and up-to-date. However, medicines can be used in different ways for different patients. It is therefore important that you follow the advice of your doctor or pharmacist, as they understand your child's illness. If you are not sure about something, ask your doctor or pharmacist. Note that this leaflet applies to the use of medicines in the UK; it may not apply in 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 the leaflet.