

Medicines for Children: information for parents and carers

Sodium valproate for preventing seizures



This leaflet is about the use of sodium valproate to prevent epileptic seizures. (Seizures may be also 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 sodium valproate suddenly, as your child may have a seizure.

Name of drug

Sodium valproate (or valproic acid)

Common brands: Epilim[®], Orlept[®], Episenta[®], Convulex[®]

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

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

What is sodium valproate available as?

Sodium valproate is available in different forms and different doses. It comes as tablets, capsules, granules, special tablets that you can crush, or as a liquid.

Some liquid forms may contain sugar.

When should I give sodium valproate?

You will usually give sodium valproate twice each day: once in the morning and once 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.

Epilim Chrono[®] is usually given only in the evening. However, your doctor may have told you to give it in the morning.

How much should I give?

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

When you first start giving sodium valproate 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: These tablets must be swallowed whole with a glass of water, juice or milk. Do not crush these tablets.



Crushable tablets: Crush the tablet and mix it with a small amount of soft food (e.g. yogurt) or a small drink. Your child should swallow the food or drink straight away, without chewing it. Make sure that they take it all.



Capsules should be swallowed whole with a glass of water, juice or milk. Your child should not chew the capsules.



Granules Sprinkle or stir the granules into a small amount of soft food (e.g. yogurt) or a small drink. Your child should then swallow the food or drink straight away, without chewing it. Make sure that they take it all.



Liquid or syrup: 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 sodium valproate to work properly, so your child may still have seizures for a while. Continue to give the medicine in the way that you have been told to.

What if my child is sick (vomits)?

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

What if I forget to give it?

- **Epilim Chrono[®]:** If you forget to give a dose, you can give it any time in the next 12 hours. After this time, wait until the next normal dose.
- **Other tablets, capsules, granules and liquids:** If you remember within 6 hours, 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 1 pm. If you remember after this time, **do not** give the missed dose. Wait until it is time to give the next normal dose.

⚠ Never give a 'double dose' of sodium valproate.

What if I give too much?

⚠ If you think you may have given your child too much sodium valproate, 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

☎ 999 If your child gets bad stomach pains or starts being sick (vomits) often, or both, **take him or her to your doctor or hospital straight away.** Your child may have a serious problem called pancreatitis.

☎ 999 Children occasionally get serious liver disease when taking sodium valproate. If your child starts being sick every few hours, has stomach pains, is very sleepy,

gets jaundice (the skin or eyes look yellowy) or has more seizures than usual, **take him or her to your doctor or hospital straight away.**

- Your child's hands may shake. Contact your doctor if this happens.
- If you notice any unusual bleeding or bruising, contact your doctor.

Other side-effects you need to know about

Your child may get these side-effects when they first start taking sodium valproate. They will usually settle down within a week or so as their body gets used to the medicine. Continue to give sodium valproate to your child as your doctor has told you to.

- Your child may be unusually sleepy, or their behaviour may change.
- Your child may be hungrier than usual – this effect can last for many months. Encourage your child to eat food that is low in fat and sugar, otherwise they will put on a lot of weight.
- Your child may feel less hungry (lose their appetite), and feel sick (nausea) or be sick (vomit). This should get better after a week or so.
- Your child may lose some hair. It will grow back, but it may be slightly curlier and darker than before.

Can other common medicines be given at the same time as sodium valproate?

- You can give your child medicines that contain paracetamol or ibuprofen, unless your doctor has told you not to.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist **before** giving any other medicines to your child. This includes herbal or complementary medicines.
- Some other medicines used to treat epilepsy may affect how well sodium valproate works, or may cause side-effects. If you are worried about side-effects, or if your child seems to be having more fits, contact your doctor or epilepsy nurse.

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.

Sodium valproate and pregnancy

- Sodium valproate may harm an unborn baby.
- The oral contraceptive pill can be used safely in women or girls who are taking sodium valproate.

General advice about medicines for epilepsy

- ⚠ **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** reduce the dose 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 medicine you have at home has 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, pharmacist or epilepsy nurse will be able to give you more information about sodium valproate 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 601 400

www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk



Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health



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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.