

Patient Name: _____ Date: _____
 Doctor Name: _____ Emergency Number: _____
 Pharmacy: _____ Number: _____

What is Valproic Acid?

It is a medicine that has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration to treat complex partial, myoclonic, and simple and complex absence seizures. This medicine can be used alone or with other seizure medicines.

When you read about any of the valproic acid drugs, you may also see the word valproate (val-PRO-ate). The words valproic acid and valproate are used interchangeably. Depakene, Depakote, Depakote ER, and Depacon (given by injection into a vein) are different forms of this medicine.

- Valproic acid has also been approved to treat migraine headaches and manic episodes associated with bipolar disorder.
- The dose of valproic acid may vary depending on why the medicine is being given and if it is given alone or with other medicines.
- Depakene is currently available in generic form for the capsules and syrup.
- Always check the appearance of the capsules with the pharmacist when the prescription is filled to be certain you are given the right medication.

Important questions to ask your doctor:

- Why am I being given this medicine? _____
- What amount should I be taking? _____

What does the drug look like and how should I take it?

Depakene®
250 mg (orange)



The word "Depakene" is printed on the side.

To take capsules:

- Swallow capsules whole with at least a full glass of water.
- Take with food to prevent stomach upset.
- Chewing tablets may cause mouth and throat irritation.

Syrup: 5 milliliters (5 ml) or 1 teaspoon is equal to 250 mg.

To take in syrup form:

- Use a special measuring spoon or device to measure the correct dose.
- Dose of syrup can be mixed with another liquid or food for better taste.
- Be certain to consume all of the liquid or food mixed with the syrup.
- Do not freeze syrup for future use.

Depakote® Tablets

Available in three strengths: The dosage is written on the sides of the tablets.

125 mg (red)



125mg

250 mg (yellow)



250mg

500 mg (pink)



500mg

To take tablets:

- Swallow capsules whole with at least a full glass of water.
- Take after food or with a meal to ease possible stomach upset.

Depakote ER® Tablets: Depakote ER is a long-acting form of Depakote that can be taken once a day. Available in two strengths:

250 mg (white oval tablets)
with Abbott logo and "HF" on the side.



500 mg (gray oval tablets)
with Abbott logo and "HC" on the side.



To take tablets:

- Must be swallowed whole with or without food.
- Do not crush, chew, or cut the tablets into pieces.

Depakote Sprinkle Capsule

125-mg (white and blue)
They can be taken whole or sprinkled.



125mg

To take capsules whole:

- Swallow with a glass of water or other liquid.

OR

To sprinkle capsule contents:

- Open the capsule and sprinkle onto a teaspoon of soft food such as apple sauce or pudding.
- Mix the medicine together with the food.
- Swallow it all right away.
- Drink a full glass of water or liquid to make sure that all the medicine has been swallowed.

Remember:

Sprinkles should not be chewed. Medicine should be used immediately after opening. Do not save any of the capsule contents for later use.

Depacon®

This is an intravenous form of valproate that is given into a vein and is generally given only in hospital settings.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Is it best to take this medicine with food? This medicine can be taken with food or on an empty stomach. Taking it with food may prevent stomach upset. Try to take it the same way each day, since taking this with food may change the time it takes to be absorbed.

What should I do if I miss a dose? If you miss or forget a dose take it as soon as possible. However, if you have missed a dose and it is within a few hours before your next dose, take only the next scheduled dose. Do not double up or take extra medicine, unless instructed to do so by your doctor.

How can I remember to take my medicine?

- Take medicine at the same time each day.
- Take medicine at the same times as some other routine, such as brushing teeth, after meals, or bedtime.
- Use a pillbox so you can check if you have taken a dose.
- Use an alarm to remind yourself of times to take a dose.
- Keep a written schedule or chart of when to take the medicine.
- Talk to your doctor or health care provider about problems remembering to take the medicine.

How long will it take for the medicine to work? It may take a number of weeks to find the right dose, and then more time may be needed to know how well the medicine works to control your seizures. How long this takes will be different for each person. It may depend on how often you have seizures, what other medicine you may be taking, and how your body responds to the drug.

Should I write down how the medicine is affecting me? It is important to write down how you feel while you are on the medicine. Also keep track of changes in how much medicine is prescribed, side effects, and changes in seizures. Take the information to all follow-up visits with your health care providers.

How should I store my medicine? Store the medicine at room temperature (25° C or 77° F), away from heat, moisture, and direct light. Do not freeze the syrup. Keep all medicine out of reach of children. Don't keep pills in the bathroom, glove box of a car, or where children can easily find them, such as in purses, on low cabinets or on counter tops.

Will this medicine affect other medicines that I am taking? Make sure to tell all your health care providers the names of all medicines, herbal or dietary supplements, vitamins and over-the-counter medicines. Some of these medicines may interfere with how valproic acid works and lower or raise the amount in your system.

Some medications that may interact with valproic acid include: oral contraceptives and other anti-epileptic medications. Please see the AED Interaction Sheets for lists of medicines that may affect valproic acid. (<http://professionals.epilepsy.com/pdfs/epilepsy-valproic-912.pdf>)

What side effects may occur? Side effects may occur with any medicine. Some side effects will go away on their own or when the dose of medicine is changed. Others may be more serious and mean that your body is not tolerating the drug. Tell your doctor about all side effects that occur, but do not stop taking the medicine without advice from your doctor. Some side effects include the following:

Common: Stomach discomfort, nausea, confusion, dizziness, headache, weight gain, tremors or shaking movements.

Less Common: Loss of appetite, weight loss, thinning of hair.

Potentially serious:

- **Liver toxicity:** Valproate may cause problems with the way the liver works. Symptoms of this may include: weakness, vomiting, swelling of the face, not eating, and more seizures. Blood tests of liver function may be high. This problem occurs most often in children who are also on other seizure medicines and in the first six months of taking the drug.

• **Bleeding problems:** Occurs rarely. May result in frequent bruising, long bleeding times, low platelet counts or other changes in blood tests.

• **Allergic reaction:** May be seen with symptoms such as hives or large red spots on the body, itching, difficulty breathing or closing of the throat.

• **Rash:** Not all rashes are caused by the medicine, but all rashes should be reported to your doctor and checked. Rashes that may be more serious usually begin in the first few weeks, but can happen at any time while you are taking it. Serious rashes may have the following symptoms and require immediate evaluation:

- Swelling of eyelids or red eyes.
- Red spots or patches on skin.
- Fever or flu-like symptoms that don't go away.

On July 10, 2008, an advisory panel was convened by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to review data that the FDA had previously collected from drug studies showing an association between many of the antiepileptic drugs (AEDs) and suicidal ideation and behavior, which together are called suicidality. According to the FDA's Alert, among the patients with epilepsy in these drug studies, 1 out of 1000 people taking the placebo (inactive substance) showed suicidality compared to approximately 3.5 out of 1000 people who took an AED. The FDA advisory panel voted to accept the FDA's data at its meeting on July 10.

The FDA has provided the following information for patients, family members, and caregivers at www.fda.gov/cder/drug/InfoSheets/HCP/antiepilepticsHCP.htm:

- Taking antiepileptic medicines may increase the risk of having suicidal thoughts or actions;
- Do not make any changes to the medication regimen without first talking with the responsible healthcare professional;
- Pay close attention to any day-to-day changes in mood, behavior and actions. These changes can happen very quickly so it is important to be mindful of any sudden differences.
- Be aware of common warning signs that might be a signal for risk of suicide. Some of these are:
 - Talking or thinking about wanting to hurt yourself or end your life
 - Withdrawing from friends and family
 - Becoming depressed or having your depression get worse
 - Becoming preoccupied with death and dying
 - Giving away prized possessions

We again urge patients and families to contact their doctor before stopping an epilepsy medication because this may possibly lead to seizures and worsening of mood.

When should I call my doctor?

- Call a doctor right away if side effects become severe or cause problems in your ability to function, or if you have any of the following problems: vomiting, extreme dizziness, fever, chills, rash, or allergic reaction.
- Do not stop the medicine without talking to a doctor first.

Can this seizure medicine affect bone health? Some seizure medicines can cause thinning of the bones and lead to bone loss. All people taking this medicine should take calcium and vitamin D supplements each day. Regular exercise and diet are also very important. People who have thinning of the bones may also need to take prescription medicines to treat this. Talk to your doctor about tests to check the health of your bones and what to do next.

Can I drink alcohol while on this medicine? People taking this medicine should not drink alcohol because valproate can increase the effects of alcohol.

May I drive while taking valproic acid? Use caution when driving, operating machinery, or performing other hazardous activities. Valproic acid may cause drowsiness, dizziness. If you have these problems or are having seizures, avoid these activities and talk to your doctor.

Just for Women:

Is this medicine safe to take during pregnancy? Valproic acid has an FDA pregnancy category of “D” meaning that there is a risk to the baby, but the benefits of the medicine may outweigh the risks of uncontrolled seizures for some women. Taking valproic acid during pregnancy may increase the risk of having a child with a major birth defect involving the development of the brain or spinal cord. Taking folic acid or folate, at doses recommended by your doctor, is very important to possibly help reduce this risk.

If you discover or suspect you are pregnant, continue use of this medicine and contact your doctor right away. It is important to discuss with your doctor the potential benefits and risks to the fetus before making any decisions about use of this medicine. Seizures can be harmful to the mother and the developing baby, but these risks can be managed with proper care.

Does this medicine affect birth control pills? Valproic acid usually does not change the effect of hormonal contraceptives or birth control. Talk to your doctor if you start or stop hormonal birth control while taking this medicine. Call your doctor if you have any signs of breakthrough bleeding or symptoms of pregnancy.

Will the medicine affect my menstrual cycle? Some women with epilepsy who are taking valproate may notice a change in menstrual cycle, such as irregular bleeding or no menstrual bleeding. Hormonal problems may also occur with cysts on the ovaries, weight problems, facial or body hair, acne, difficulties becoming pregnant, changes in blood pressure or the way your body responds to insulin produced by the pancreas. Talk to the doctor if any of these problems occur.

Can I breast feed while taking this medicine? In general, women taking valproate can breastfeed while using this medicine. However, the drug does pass through breast milk in small amounts. According to the American Academy of Neurology, the benefits for the infant and mother are believed to outweigh the risk for adverse effects. Talk to your doctor regarding this option.

Are there any specific vitamins I should be taking? Women who could possibly get pregnant should be taking at least 0.4 milligrams (mg) of folic acid or folate each day. Women taking valproate may need to take a higher dose of folic acid, up to 4 mg each day. Talk to your health care provider for specific instructions. Folic acid is also found in leafy dark green vegetables, fruits and juices, and lentils.

More Questions?

For more detailed information about valproic acid, please visit www.epilepsy.com and click on Treatment >> Seizure Medicines (www.epilepsy.com/epilepsy/seizure_medicines.html)