

Valproate (pronounced val-pro-ate)



What is valproate?

Valproate is the name of the active part of sodium valproate (Epilim[®], Episenta[®]), valproic acid (Convulex[®]) and semisodium valproate (Depakote[®]). It is made as tablets, capsules, crushable tablets, a sugar-free liquid, a syrup, granules and injection.

What does valproate help?

Valproate is usually used to help treat the symptoms of bipolar mood disorder (especially mania) and epilepsy e.g. it can help stop people having seizures or fits. It is also used to help the symptoms of bipolar depression and some other conditions.

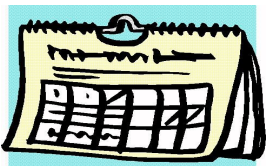
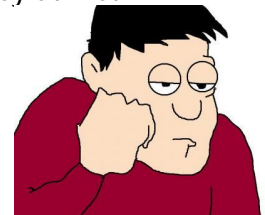


How and when should I take valproate?

Swallow the tablets with at least half a glass of water whilst sitting or standing. This is to make sure that they reach the stomach and do not stick in your throat. For the liquid, use a medicine spoon, dropper or oral syringe. Episenta[®] capsules can be emptied onto cold food or drink and swallowed straight away without chewing, as can the granules. Taking it at mealtimes may make it easier for you to remember as there is no problem about taking valproate with or after food. If the label says to take it once a day this is usually best at bedtime as it may make you drowsy at first.

How long will I have to wait before it works?

This will depend on what you are taking it for but the effect usually starts in a week or so, and builds over several weeks.

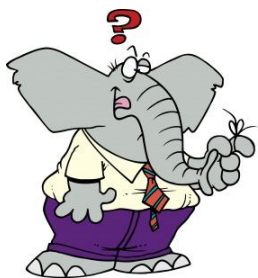


How long will I need to keep taking valproate for?

This will depend on what you are taking it for. It may be for several months or years.

Can I stop taking valproate suddenly?

It is better not to do this without talking it over first with other people e.g. relatives or your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. Things normally work out much better if you stop medication in a planned way. Your symptoms can return if treatment is stopped too early. This may occur some days, weeks or even months after valproate has been stopped. When the time comes, you should withdraw valproate by a gradual reduction in the dose over several weeks.



What should I do if I forget to take a dose of valproate?

Take the missed dose as soon as you remember unless it is within about 4 hours of your next dose. If you remember after this just take the next dose as normal. Do not try to catch up by taking two doses at once as you may get more side-effects.

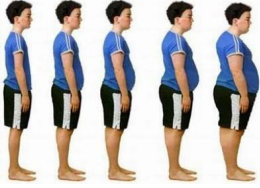



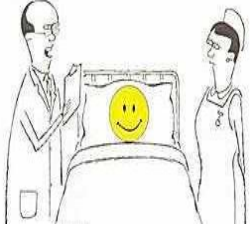





Can I cycle or drive while I am taking valproate?

You may feel a bit light-headed at first when taking valproate. Until this wears off, or you know how valproate affects you, be careful cycling and, if you are old enough, do not drive or operate machinery.



What sort of side-effects might I get with valproate?

The table below will show you some of the main side effects you might get from valproate, and what you can do about them. The more common ones are near the top of the list.

 <p>Weight gain. Eating more and putting on weight. A diet full of cereal, vegetables and fibre may help prevent weight gain.</p>	 <p>Nausea and vomiting Feeling sick and being sick. Take your valproate with or after food. This tends to wear off after a few days or a week or so. If you are sick for longer, contact your doctor.</p>
 <p>Hair loss Some of your hair falls out and may seem thinner. This stops after a while. Discuss with your doctor. This can be upsetting for some people. Sometimes it grows back a little curly.</p>	 <p>Sleepiness Feeling sleepy or sluggish. This can last for a few hours or longer after taking a dose. Don't drive, cycle or use machinery. Ask your doctor if you can take valproate at a different time of day. It should wear off after a while.</p>
 <p>Jaundice. If you get pain just under the ribs, looking a bit yellow, and feeling sick, stop taking valproate and contact your doctor straight away, don't delay.</p>	 <p>Ataxia. This is where you feel very unsteady on your feet. Your dose may be too high. Talk to your doctor or nurse about this.</p>
 <p>Bruising or bleeding easily. This can be a sign of something more serious. You may not have enough platelets in your blood. Stop taking valproate and see your doctor straight away for a blood test.</p>	 <p>Fatigue. You feel tired all the time. This may happen early on in treatment and usually wears off. If you feel like this for more than a week after starting valproate, tell your doctor. It may be possible to adjust your dose slightly.</p>
 <p>Skin rash. This can be a rash or itching seen anywhere on the skin. If this happens, stop taking your valproate and contact your doctor now.</p>	 <p>Confusion. Your mind is all mixed up. Your dose may be too high. Contact your doctor now.</p>

Do not be worried by this list of side effects. Some people get no side effects at all and others may get some effects that are not listed in this table. If you think you might have a side effect to your medicine, you should ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. If you want to know more, go to our website for links to other websites with more information.

The small print: This leaflet is to help you understand about your medicine. You should also read the manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet (PIL). You may find lots more on the internet but beware as internet-based information is not always accurate. Do not share medicines with anyone else. Go to our website for fuller answers to these and many other questions e.g. driving, women's health, how it works, doses and interactions, and about the conditions. The "Handy charts" will help you compare the main medicines for each condition, how they work and their side effects.