

Making the most of your anti-epileptic drugs

Starting on anti-epileptic drugs

When you start taking anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs) you will slowly build up the dose. This gives your body time to get used to it. It also makes side effects less likely.

It can take your body a while to get used to new AEDs. Some people experience more side effects during the first couple of months after starting a new AED. These usually settle down once your body gets used to the medication. You could speak to your doctor or Epilepsy Specialist Nurse (ESN) if you are experiencing side effects.

Taking anti-epileptic drugs

It is important to take your medication exactly as prescribed. This is important because the medication is taken to help prevent seizures from happening by correcting a chemical imbalance in the brain. Not taking your AEDs regularly is the most common cause of seizures for those on medication.

Your body breaks down medication like it breaks down food. To keep the level of drug high enough to control your seizures, you have to take your medication every day at around the same time. If you miss a tablet or take it much later than your normal time, the level of drug in your system is lowered. This means you can be more likely to have a seizure. Your seizure control may also be affected if you accidentally take your tablets twice, or take your doses too close together. You may also be more likely to experience side effects.

Do not stop or reduce your medication suddenly, or deliberately miss a dose because you want to have a good night out and drink. This is dangerous and you will be more likely to have a seizure. Always talk this over with your doctor or epilepsy specialist nurse first.

Your doctor or epilepsy specialist nurse will have discussed with you what to do if you miss a tablet. If you have missed a dose or have accidentally overdosed on your medication, contact your Epilepsy Specialist Nurse, GP or **NHS 24** on **111**.

There are many ways to help you remember to take your medication on time, such as using pill reminders or smartphone alarms or apps. If you want to find out more, speak to one of our Contact Officers on 0808 800 2200 or email enquiries@epilepsyscotland.org.uk

Branded or generic anti-epileptic drugs?

There may be small differences between branded and generic versions of a particular AED, such as a different coating or binding material. Even though the active ingredient stays the same, this may change the way the AEDs control seizures. Most people will be fine but in some cases a switch between branded and generic versions could trigger a seizure or cause side effects.

The SIGN (Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network) guidelines recommend getting the same make or brand of AED all the time:

‘Formulations of AEDs are not interchangeable and generic substitution should not be routinely made.’ (SIGN 143, Section 4.2.3, page 14)

The MHRA (Medicine and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency) has issued further guidance on this dividing anti-epileptic drugs into three categories, ie

- (1) those drugs which should not be switched;
- (2) those drugs which may be switched but this decision should be based on a clinical judgment, taking into account other factors as well; and
- (3) those drugs where it is generally considered to be unnecessary to maintain one particular make of a drug.

To ensure you always get the same make of drug, ask your GP to always write the same AED name on your prescription. If you take a generic version, ask your GP to write the manufacturer's name on the prescription too. Your pharmacist will have to give you exactly what is prescribed and cannot change your medication to a different make or brand. If the packaging of your AEDs looks different, ask your GP or pharmacist to check that it is exactly the same medicine as usual.

Up to 70% of people with epilepsy find that their seizures are controlled with medication.

If you want to find out more about other treatment options, contact our helpline 0808 800 2200 or email us at enquiries@epilepsyscotland.org.uk