

Making the most of anti-seizure medication

Starting on anti-seizure medication (ASM)

When you start a new anti-seizure medication, you will do this in stages. Your epilepsy specialist nurse (ESN) or neurologist will usually start you off on a lower dosage, then slowly build it up to the level where it hopefully prevents seizures or reduces the number of seizures you have. The initial lower dosage gives your body time to get used to the medication and reduces possible side effects.

Some people experience more side effects during the first couple of months after starting a new anti-seizure medication, but this often settles down.

If you still experience strong side effects after that initial period, please seek medical advice from your epilepsy specialist nurse or neurologist. They can help you decide on the best way to take your medication to reduce side effects. Sometimes they may need to make changes to the dosage.

Always take your medication

It is important to take your medication exactly as prescribed. The medication helps prevent seizures from happening by correcting a chemical imbalance in the brain. You are more likely to have seizures if you do not take your anti-seizure medication every day.

Your body breaks down medication like it breaks down food. To keep the level of your medication high enough to prevent seizures, you have to take your medication every day at around the same time.

Never stop, reduce or increase your medication unless this is advised by your epilepsy specialist nurse or neurologist. Even just skipping one tablet can increase your risk of having a seizure.

What happens if I forget to take my medication?

If you miss a tablet, the level of the medication in your system is lowered. This makes you more likely to have a seizure. The same might happen if you take your tablet several hours later than your normal time because by that time, the medication levels in your system will have reduced too much giving you less protection against a seizure.

Do not automatically take a double dose next time. Your epilepsy specialist nurse will usually discuss with you in advance what to do if you have missed a dosage as this differs for each medication.

As a general rule, if you only take your medication once a day, take it as soon as you remember. If you take your medication twice a day, usually mornings and evenings, only take it if you remember within four to six hours of when you should have taken it. If it is longer, you may need to wait until your next dosage is due, but your epilepsy specialist nurse will need to advise you on this.

What happens if I take too much of my medication?

If you take too much of your medication, or take your doses too close together, you may experience an increase in side effects such as feeling tired or lethargic.

If you have missed a dose or have accidentally overdosed on your medication, always contact your epilepsy specialist nurse, GP or NHS 24 on 111 for advice.

How can I remember to take my medication?

To help you remember to take your medication exactly as prescribed:

- Use a dossette box
- Ask your chemist for a blister pack for all your medications
- Set an alarm on your smartphone or smart speaker
- Link it to a regular activity, such as immediately after breakfast or brushing your teeth.

Using a seizure diary or app

The only way to find out if your medication is working is by keeping a detailed note of your seizures. This includes information when your seizures happened, what they looked/felt like and what happened in the run up to a seizure. If you start having a different type of seizure, or you notice them increase or decrease, this is also important information for your epilepsy team.

Your epilepsy specialist nurse and neurologist will appreciate this information so that they can take this into account when reviewing your medication.

Always attend your review appointments with your neurologist.

Different looking medication package

A medication package can sometimes look different or have a different name, but they are the same medicine. They are made by different manufacturers but the active ingredients, ie those that control/prevent seizures, are exactly the same.

With some anti-seizure medication (ASM) it is important that you always get the same brand (name) because switching may trigger a breakthrough seizure. With other ASMs it is less important, and a switch is well tolerated.

To find out more about your own medication(s), check out the page [Antiepileptic drugs: new advice on switching between different manufacturers' products for a particular drug - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/antiepileptic-drugs-new-advice-on-switching-between-different-manufacturers-products-for-a-particular-drug) on

the UK Government website. Your epilepsy specialist nurse will also give you more information about your medication.

If you are concerned about getting a different looking package or the medication has a different name, speak to your chemist, epilepsy specialist nurse or GP.

Further information

If you want to talk about anything mentioned in this factsheet or are looking for more information, please contact our helpline 0808 800 2200 or email us at contact@epilepsyscotland.org.uk.

Our resources are always free. If you would like to support our work, please text FACTS to 70085 to donate £3. Texts cost £3 plus one standard rate message.



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