

Pregabalin & Gabapentin

Pregabalin and Gabapentin come from a family of medications called 'anti-convulsant'. These medications affect how nerves send pain signals. Other drugs from this family of medications are used to treat epilepsy (fits), but pregabalin and gabapentin are used to treat pain.

They are particularly useful for sharp, stabbing or burning pains (neuropathic pains) and less likely to cause sleepiness than Amitriptyline. It is best to start with a small dose and then increase it, although it may take time to work and in some cases you may need a large dose to see an effect. If you start to get side effects, stay at that dose or decrease it slightly until you adjust to the medication.

Their side effects include dizziness, sleepiness, swollen ankles, impaired memory, bowel disturbances and sometimes weight gain. These medications should not be taken during pregnancy. Pregabalin and Gabapentin don't affect a natural chemical produced by the body called Serotonin, so it can be used together with other neuropathic pain medications like amitriptyline or duloxetine.

Starting medications at a low dose is great for avoiding side effects but might mean it takes longer to get to a dose that helps your pain. If you find that a low dose is enough to help your pain, then there is no need to keep increasing the dose.

A slow and easy way to start pregabalin is:

- 25mg at night, then
- 37.5mg at night, then
- 75mg at night, then
- 37.5mg in the morning and 75mg at night, then
- 75mg twice daily

If you have been given 75mg capsules of pregabalin, you can lower the dose by opening the capsule and dissolving the contents in water. If you drink 1/3 of the water, you will have drunk 25mg of pregabalin. If you drink half the water, you will have drunk 37.5mg of pregabalin. You can increase the dose every 7 days with the guidance of your general practitioner to a maximum daily dose of 300mg (if you have normal kidney function).

A slow and easy way to start gabapentin is to increase the dose every 3-7 days. This should be guided by a doctor, especially because doses are less if you do not have normal kidney function.

- 100mg at night,
- then 200mg at night
- then 300mg at night
- then 100mg in the morning and 300mg at night
- then 200mg in the morning and 300mg at night
- then 300mg twice daily.

Never stop pregabalin or gabapentin suddenly as withdrawal effects may occur including anxiety, insomnia, nausea, pain and sweating. These drugs should be weaned slowly every week.