

*This factsheet looks at the differences between generic and branded anti-epileptic medication and also includes ways that you can help your treatment to stay effective.*

Anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs) prevent seizures from happening. AEDs are drugs that need to be taken regularly, every day, and are usually taken for a number of years.

All drugs have an 'active ingredient' (the ingredient that treats the condition), which is also called the generic name. All drugs with the same active ingredient will have the same generic name. Different pharmaceutical companies may produce their own versions of a drug under the generic name or also under a brand name - a name that only applies to that one company's version of the medication. For example, the brand name Tegretol contains the active ingredient carbamazepine.

### **Why do some AEDs look different even though I am told they are the same drug?**

Several pharmaceutical companies produce several different AEDs. AEDs often look different, so it is easier to tell them apart. Some AEDs are produced by more than one manufacturer and each company's version will look different, even though they contain the same active ingredient. For example sodium valproate and Epilim contain the same active ingredient, valproic acid, but are produced by different companies.

### **If different drugs have the same active ingredient are they exactly the same?**

Although all AEDs with the same generic name have the same active ingredient, it does not mean that each version is exactly the same. For example, tablets and capsules have colouring or binding ingredients which may differ between versions of the AED. In some cases these variations may affect how the drug is absorbed in the body and, as a result, this affects the amount of active drug that is available to work on the brain. So the same dose of one form of an AED may produce a higher level of the drug in the brain, compared to another form of the AED made by a different company. Switching from a form that gives a higher level of the drug to one that gives a lower level might make seizures more likely to occur.

Similarly, switching the other way from a form that gives a lower level to one that gives a higher level may cause side effects.

### **What should I do if my doctor prescribes a drug that looks different from my regular one?**

If your doctor puts the generic name of your AED on your prescription, your pharmacist can give you any AED which has that generic name. This means that you may be given a different form of your AED than the one you usually take. It may also look different from what you are used to.

It is a good idea to check your AED at the counter when the pharmacist gives it to you, to ensure that the drug and dosage are correct. Going to the same pharmacist each time is helpful as they may keep a record of your AEDs so they can give you the same version. If they give you an AED that looks different to the one you normally take, you can ask them to check it is the right AED, and, if necessary, whether you can change it.

If you are worried, talk to your doctor. You could ask your doctor to write the brand name and name of the manufacturer on your prescriptions instead of just the generic name. If your doctor does this, the pharmacist has to give you that particular form of AED.

### **Why do I need to keep taking my epilepsy drugs when I'm feeling well and not having seizures?**

If you feel well and are not having any seizures, this may be because your AEDs are working well. If you stop taking your AEDs, your seizures may come back. If you have had at least two years seizure-free then your doctor may consider stopping your AEDs if this is what you would like to happen. However, if your AEDs are gradually withdrawn, even if you have not been having seizures for a long time, there is still a risk of your seizures coming back. The risk of seizures returning is different for each person.

### How can I help my treatment to stay effective?

Alongside always getting the same version of AEDs, there are other things that can help you to get the best out of your AEDs.

#### Taking your AEDs regularly

Taking your AEDs at the same time each day, at regular intervals, for example 7am and 7pm, can help to keep the AED levels steady in your body throughout the day. You may find it helpful to take your medication at the same time as another regular activity, such as brushing your teeth in the morning and before you go to bed, or when you eat.

#### Using a pillbox or drug wallet

Using a pill box, or drug wallet, that has a section for each day of the week may also help you to keep track of when you have taken your medication. These are available from pharmacies and also from the NSE. There are two different sizes available depending on how many tablets you take each day. → Visit [www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/shop](http://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/shop) or call Epilepsy Information Services on 01494 601 392.

Using an alarm can also be helpful in reminding you when to take your AEDs. Some pill boxes also have alarms on them.

#### Seizure diary

Using a seizure diary can also be useful. This helps you to keep a record of your seizures and track any changes or possible side effects of your drugs. This allows you and your doctor to see whether your AEDs are working well and also if there is anything that may be triggering your seizures, for example being tired, unwell or stressed.

→ You can get a free seizure diary by calling NSE's helpline on 01494 601 400 or by visiting NSE's online shop at [www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/shop](http://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/shop)

### Other tips

- The patient information leaflet (PIL) that comes with your AED has important information about the AED, possible side effects to look out for, and what to do if you forget to take your AED or you are sick.
- If you are prescribed a drug for another medical condition it is important that the doctor knows about your epilepsy and the AEDs you take. This is because although many medications can be taken alongside AEDs, some other drugs can make seizures more likely to occur and may affect the levels of AEDs in your body.
- If possible, avoid 'triggers' (situations that make seizures more likely to occur). Triggers for seizures vary but common triggers include lack of sleep, drinking alcohol, recreational drugs, anxiety and stress.
- Keep an eye on your supply of AEDs to make sure that you don't run out.
- If you are worried about any aspect of your epilepsy, talk to your doctor or pharmacist or call NSE's helpline.

### Further resources and information

#### Yellow Card Scheme

The Yellow Card Scheme is a way of reporting side effects to the Medicines Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). You can get a form from your GP, pharmacy, hospital or NHS drop-in centre. You can also fill in the form online at <http://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk> or call 0808 100 3352.

For more information on medication see NSE leaflet 'epilepsy - medication for adults' available online or from the helpline.

For detailed information on all types of AED visit Medicine Guides at [www.medguides.medicine.org.uk](http://www.medguides.medicine.org.uk)

To become an associate member call 01494 601 402 or email [members@epilepsysociety.org.uk](mailto:members@epilepsysociety.org.uk)  
For a fundraising pack call 01494 601 300 or email [fundraising@epilepsysociety.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@epilepsysociety.org.uk)

#### Epilepsy Information Services National Society for Epilepsy

Chesham Lane, Chalfont St. Peter, Bucks SL9 0RJ  
[www.epilepsysociety.org.uk](http://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk)

#### Epilepsy Helpline

01494 601 400 (national call rate)  
Monday – Friday 10am – 4pm  
(Translation service available)

