

medicines use review – epilepsy consultation brief



This consultation brief includes topics that may be useful to cover in a medicines use review (MUR) for a patient with epilepsy who takes anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs). Not all topics will be relevant for everyone. You can use this form as a prompt for what you might want to cover during an MUR.

MUR questions and prompts

- **How are you getting on with your medicines?**
- Are you taking your medicines as prescribed?
- Do you change the amount of medicines you take, for example taking more or less than prescribed?
- Do you ever take any other medicines that you have purchased from another pharmacy or anywhere else?

- **How do you take or use each of your medicines?**
- When do you take your medicines?

- **Are you having any problems with your medicines or concerns about taking or using them?**
- Are you able to get your prescriptions regularly?
- How do you feel about taking your medicines?
- Are there any reasons why you are not able to take your medicines, for example difficulty swallowing your medicines?

- **Do you think your medicines are working? Is this different from what you were expecting?**
- Do you know how your medicines work?
- Are you still having seizures or are they becoming less frequent?
- Are there any changes to seizure type, frequency or pattern?
- Do you record your seizures in a seizure diary or by using an app?

- **Do you think you are getting any side effects or unexpected effects?**
- Are you able to 'put up with' any side effects if the medication is controlling your seizures?
- Do you keep a note of the name of any of the medicines that you take?

- **People often miss taking doses of their medicine for a wide range of reasons. Have you missed any doses of your medicine or changed when you take it?**
- When did you last miss a dose?
- Do you have problems remembering to take your medicines regularly?

- **What else would you like to know about your medicines or is there anything you would like me to go over again?**
- Is there anything else that would help you to manage your medication?

Key messages for patients

- The purpose of an MUR is to help you manage all your medicines effectively.
- It can be helpful to know as much about your own epilepsy as possible, including how your treatment works.
- Some drugs can affect and be affected by other drugs and some herbal medicines are not recommended for people with epilepsy, for example St Johns Wort.
- Your pharmacist or doctor can give you more information if you want to take medicines that have not been prescribed for you.

- AEDs work best if they are taken each day at the same time.
- For most AEDs it does not matter when in the day they are taken, morning or evening. If taken more than once a day it is useful to take them evenly spaced out.

- It is important to have a regular supply of AEDs. Suddenly stopping AEDs can cause seizures to start again. You can talk to your pharmacist about setting up a repeat prescription to help avoid running out of medicines.
- The aim of treatment is to stop seizures with the smallest dose of the fewest number of AEDs, and with the least side effects.
- Some AEDs come in different forms including tablets, capsules, liquids and syrups, sprinkles and granules, and some are available as 'slow release'.

- AEDs are preventative medicines taken to try and stop seizures happening.
- It is important not to stop taking your medicine suddenly – talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you are considering stopping your medicine.
- AEDs are not a 'cure' as they do not affect the underlying cause.
- If your seizures are infrequent it can take longer to see if medicines are working.
- If AEDs are being taken as prescribed and seizures are still happening referral to a specialist is indicated.
- Visit www.epilepsysociety.org.uk for a free seizure diary or to download the Epilepsy Toolkit app.

- The patient information leaflet (PIL) that comes with the packaging for each medicine has information about side effects.
- As with all medicines AEDs can cause side effects and these can vary from one AED to another.
- Swapping between different forms of AED may affect seizure control or cause side effects.
- Depending on which AED you take, you may need to ensure you stick to a specific brand. This is sometimes called 'consistency of supply'.
- Side effects that are not included in the PIL (including breakthrough seizures) can be reported to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) through their 'Yellow Card' scheme.

- It is important not to miss a dose of your medicine. Pill boxes, drug wallets, and 'app' reminders may help to remind you to take your medicines. (Pharmacists: remember not all medicines are suitable to go in pill boxes or drug wallets so advise the patient to check with you if they decide to use one.)
- AEDs can affect memory. Taking high doses of more than one AED may be more likely to cause memory problems.
- Memory problems related to epilepsy can make remembering to take medicine difficult.

- Visit www.epilepsysociety.org.uk or call our helpline (see back page for details) for more information about epilepsy and treatment.

Special issues for girls and women with epilepsy

- Catamenial epilepsy – (hormone-related seizures, only at certain times during the menstrual cycle).
- Sodium valproate can affect periods/polycystic ovary syndrome.
- Some AEDs are enzyme-inducing, reducing the effectiveness of the oral contraceptive pill (in addition the AED lamotrigine can be affected by the pill).
- Increased dose of morning-after pill may be indicated.
- Importance of planning a pregnancy whenever possible/preconception counselling.
- Folic acid – DoH recommendation of higher dose (5mg) for women with epilepsy.
- Potential impact of AEDs on unborn baby/foetal anti-convulsant syndrome – **urgent referral to specialist indicated.**

Looking after yourself

- **Alcohol** – Alcohol can affect how well AEDs work and can also trigger seizures, particularly during a hangover.
- **Anxiety** – Some people with epilepsy have a higher risk of anxiety. Anxiety may be triggered by a particular memory, such as having a seizure, and the fear that it may happen again. Finding ways to manage anxiety can be more useful than trying to stop feeling anxious.
- **Exercise** – Exercise can help improve fitness, energy levels and mood and help relieve stress.
- **Diet** – Eating a balanced diet from different food groups helps the body and brain to function, helping us to stay healthy. This may help reduce the risk of seizures for some people with epilepsy.
- **Flashing lights (photosensitive epilepsy)** – Up to 5% of people with epilepsy have photosensitive epilepsy where seizures are triggered by flashing lights or contrasting light and dark patterns.
- **Sleep** – Getting good sleep can be important for everyone, as tiredness and lack of sleep can trigger seizures for some people. In some types of epilepsy, seizures can happen as someone is waking up and for a few hours afterwards. Seizures that happen during the night can disrupt sleep and seizures during the day can affect the next night's sleep.
- **Stress** – Stress can be a common 'trigger' for seizures. Improving overall health and wellbeing may help reduce stress.

Epilepsy Society information resources

Epilepsy Society produces information for patients and health and social care professionals on various topics around epilepsy.

For patients (leaflets/booklets/factsheets/app)

Complementary therapies
Diet and nutrition
Drug wallets and medication aids
Epilepsy surgery
Exercise
Generic and branded AEDs
Leisure
Making the most of your pharmacist
Medication for epilepsy (booklet)
Medication for epilepsy (chart)
Memory
Photosensitive epilepsy
Pregnancy and parenting
Seizure diary
Smartphone app
Sleep
Vagus nerve stimulation (VNS) therapy
Women
Yellow card scheme
Visit www.epilepsysociety.org.uk or call the helpline for printed copies.

For pharmacists

Visit www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/forpharmacists

Epilepsy Society Professional online membership
www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/professional-membership

Further information

MHRA safety advice about AEDs and changing products – www.mhra.gov.uk and search 'AEDs changing products'

NICE clinical guideline 137, technology appraisal 232, epilepsy pathway and quality standard
www.nice.org.uk/Guidance/Conditions-and-diseases/Neurological-conditions/Epilepsy

NICE clinical knowledge summaries – www.cks.nice.org.uk

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Epilepsy Society, Chesham Lane
Chalfont St Peter, Bucks SL9 0RJ

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www.epilepsysociety.org.uk



helpline

01494 601 400

Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm,

Wednesday 9am to 8pm.

Confidential (national call rate)