

GABAPENTIN/PREGABALIN

You May Be at Risk For a Fall

If you are taking one of these medications:

Gabapentin

- Neurontin
- Gralise
- FusePag Fanatrex

Pregabalin

- Lyrica
- Lyrica CR



Test Your Knowledge About Gabapentin/Pregabalin

	TRUE	FALSE
1. This medicine will reduce pain for everyone who takes it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. This medicine is safe and effective, especially at high doses.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. New side effects can appear, even after taking this medicine for several years at the same dose.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. This medicine is safe to use with other pain management medicine like opioid medicines.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Did you know?

Gabapentin or pregabalin do not always effectively reduce pain. Your health care provider can re-evaluate your pain levels on a regular basis to make sure the medication is still working.

Answers

1 FALSE: This medicine will reduce pain for everyone who takes it.

Gabapentin or pregabalin do not always effectively reduce pain. Your healthcare provider can re-evaluate your pain levels on a regular basis to make sure the medication is still working.

2 FALSE: This medicine is safe and effective, especially at high doses.

Increasing the dose of gabapentin or pregabalin does not always improve pain control but can increase your risk of side effects. Side effects are frequent and can include feeling sleepy, dizzy, and losing your balance.

3 TRUE: New side effects can appear, even after taking this medicine for several years at the same dose.

New side effects may develop after years of taking the same dose of medication. This could be due to age-related changes in your body such as decreased kidney function, new disease states or new medications.

4 FALSE: This medicine is safe to use with other pain medicine like opioid medicines.

Using Gabapentin and pregabalin with opioid medication (narcotics) can cause serious breathing problems that lead to death.



Did you know?

Important things to know about gabapentin and pregabalin.

- ▶ As your body ages, you become more sensitive to the side effects of these medications for various reasons, including changes in your kidney function and more sensitivity of your brain to sedative medications.
- ▶ Pregabalin and gabapentin can cause falls, slurred speech, slowed reflexes, drowsiness, lightheadedness, slowed breathing, memory problems and confusion. Even if you are not experiencing these symptoms, speak to your doctor or pharmacist to decide if there are better options to treat your pain.
- ▶ Taking gabapentin or pregabalin with alcohol or other sedative medications such as sleeping pills or opioids increases the risk of severe sedation, breathing problems and can cause death.
- ▶ If gabapentin and pregabalin are not reducing your pain or are causing you side effects, the best way to stop the medication is to reduce the dose gradually with the help of your doctor or pharmacist.

Use of these medications with other pain medications such as opioids can cause serious side effects including slow or shallow breathing, slowed reflexes, and extreme drowsiness.



So ask yourself

	YES	NO
• Do you feel tired, dizzy or off balance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Do you have problems with attention or memory?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Are you experiencing leg swelling or weight gain?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, talk to your doctor or pharmacist to see if this medicine is causing your symptoms.



Alternatives for Gabapentin and Pregabalin

Depending on your reason for taking gabapentin or pregabalin, there are alternative ways to deal with pain with less treatment side effects. Review this list and place a check mark next to potential solutions you are willing to try.

Self-care

- Get 7-8 hours of sleep most nights.
- Eat a balanced diet with fruits and vegetables.
- Maintain a healthy body weight.
- Incorporate physical exercise to your daily routine to increase your strength, flexibility, and endurance.

Medications, procedures, and devices

- Try topical pain medications or lidocaine patches that you can apply to the area with pain.
- Ask your doctor about other oral medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil).

Improving pain management skills

- Taking multiple therapies at the same time to help with pain relief to address multiple factors of the condition. Your doctor can help you coordinate the treatments from multiple therapies.
- Talk to a therapist about a self-management program for pain. A self-management program can help you take control of how you deal with pain.
- Depending on your diagnosis, physical therapy or massage therapy might help the pain you are experiencing.
- Acupuncture can relieve pain and discomfort from a variety of conditions. Ask your doctor if acupuncture is recommended for your condition.

Mr. R's Story

Mr. R had been taking gabapentin for chronic low back pain for years.

"I'm 73 years old and have suffered from chronic lower back pain for several years from an old sports injury. Three years ago, my doctor prescribed gabapentin (Neurontin) to help with my back pain. I don't know if gabapentin was improving my back pain. I did not have side effects, so I continued to use it three times a day for years.

In the past few months, I started noticing my legs would swell up, particularly in the evening. I also had "dizzy spells" during the day. One morning, I got out of bed and started walking down the stairs to make coffee. I was a bit dizzy and I missed a step. Luckily, I caught myself on the banister at the last minute.

Even though I was not hurt, it scared me quite a bit.

At my next appointment, I talked to my doctor about how I had been feeling over the past few months, the near fall and the leg swelling. My doctor told me that the gabapentin could have been causing these side effects. She suggested we try to gradually reduce my medicine over a few weeks. She also recommended physical therapy to help with lower back pain.

After reducing my medication over a few weeks and starting physical therapy, my lower back pain improved. I feel steadier on my feet.

I wish I had talked to my doctor sooner about this medicine. I realize now that asking my doctor the right questions and being aware of changes in my body has helped me improve my health."

Consult your doctor

If you are using this medication for nerve pain related to diabetes, ask your doctor about other ways to manage your symptoms.

Gradually reducing your dose

Do not reduce your dose without your doctor's supervision.

See your doctor to develop a personalized plan that's right for you.

How will my doctor reduce the dose of pregabalin or gabapentin?

- Everyone is different. Gradually reducing your dose of gabapentin or pregabalin requires an individualized plan.
- Your doctor can work with you to find an effective plan to manage your pain while safely and slowly reducing your dose over time.

If I reduce my dose of medication, will I have symptoms?

- Reducing the dose of gabapentin or pregabalin quickly may cause you to feel symptoms. These may include trouble sleeping (insomnia), nausea, anxiety, or headaches. Slowly lowering the dose over time, known as tapering, can help reduce these symptoms. Your doctor or pharmacist may consider a slower tapering program if you have been on very high doses or have been taking the medication for a long time.

If I reduce my dose of medication, will my pain get worse?

- Working with your healthcare professional, you may be able to make changes to these medications without worsening pain symptoms. High doses of gabapentin or pregabalin do not always improve pain and are more likely to cause side effects.



Tapering-off program

Following a schedule directed by your doctor or pharmacist to slowly lower your pregabalin or gabapentin dose, also called tapering, can help reduce the risk of withdrawal symptoms. Tapering schedules often take longer than five weeks and you may need to use multiple copies of this page for a full taper. A typical tapering schedule for pregabalin or gabapentin is approximately 1-4 weeks.

Ask your doctor to complete the chart below for your own tapering schedule:

TAPER SCHEDULE								
Week	Time of day	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Week	Morning							
	Noon							
	Afternoon							
	Evening							
Week	Morning							
	Noon							
	Afternoon							
	Evening							
Week	Morning							
	Noon							
	Afternoon							
	Evening							
Week	Morning							
	Noon							
	Afternoon							
	Evening							

Please consult your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist before stopping any medication.

