

# Sodium valproate and pregnancy

## What do I need to know?

### Important information for girls and young women

- Please read this information carefully and keep it somewhere safe so that you can read it again. You may want to discuss it with your friends or family.
- Further information about how to take sodium valproate can be found on [www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk/sodium-valproate-preventing-seizures](http://www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk/sodium-valproate-preventing-seizures)

Sodium valproate is a highly effective medicine for the treatment of epilepsy.

- It is vital that you do not become pregnant while taking sodium valproate because it can harm a developing baby.
- You can discuss contraception with your doctor, epilepsy team, or family planning services – make sure they know that you are taking sodium valproate.
- If there is any chance you might be pregnant, contact your doctor or nurse as soon as possible.
- Do not stop taking sodium valproate, as you may have more seizures.
- Sodium valproate is also known as valproic acid and by the brand names Convulex<sup>®</sup>, Epilim<sup>®</sup>, Epilim Chrono<sup>®</sup>, Epilim Chronosphere<sup>®</sup>, Episenta<sup>®</sup>, Epival<sup>®</sup> and Orlept<sup>®</sup>.

### Why mustn't I become pregnant while taking sodium valproate?

#### Sodium valproate can cause physical harm to a developing baby.

- The baby may develop spina bifida, in which the spine does not develop properly.
- The face and skull may not form properly, resulting in cleft lip and palate.
- The arms and legs, heart, kidneys, urinary tract and sex organs may not develop properly.

#### The baby may also have developmental problems after birth.

- Their development may be delayed, so that they walk or talk later than would be expected.
- They may have low intelligence, memory problems, or poor language skills, with difficulty in speaking and understanding.
- They may have an increased risk of childhood autism spectrum disorders and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

### How do I make sure that I don't become pregnant?

- If you are sexually active, it is vital that you use contraception to protect against becoming pregnant.
- You can discuss contraception with your epilepsy team, your doctor or family planning services.
- You are at risk of becoming pregnant even if you don't have periods, so it is vital that you use contraception when having sex.

### What should I do if I think I might be pregnant?

- Talk to an adult you trust and contact your doctor or nurse straightaway for advice and support.
- Continue to take your medicine in the meantime.

### Can I take a different medicine?

- Several medicines are used to treat epilepsy of different types; however, some of these may also have harmful effects on developing babies.
- You should discuss your medicine with your healthcare team.

### Who to contact for more information

Your doctor, epilepsy nurse or pharmacist will be able to give you more information about sodium valproate and other medicines used to treat epilepsy. You can also get useful information from:

#### England: NHS 111

Tel 111 - [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

#### Scotland: NHS 24

Tel 111 - [www.nhs24.com](http://www.nhs24.com)

#### Wales: NHS Direct

Tel 0845 4647 (2p/min) or 111  
[www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)

#### Northern Ireland: NI Direct

[www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk)

#### Young Epilepsy

Helpline: 01342 831 342

[www.youngepilepsy.org.uk](http://www.youngepilepsy.org.uk)

#### Epilepsy Society

Helpline: 01494 601 400

[www.epilepsysociety.org.uk](http://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk)

#### Epilepsy Action

Helpline: 0808 800 5050

[www.epilepsy.org.uk](http://www.epilepsy.org.uk)

[www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk](http://www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk)