



## Sodium valproate: Information for Patients and Families

### What is sodium valproate?

Sodium valproate is a medication used to treat epilepsy. It is taken by mouth and is available as a syrup, tablets or granules. It is usually taken once or twice a day.

### How does it work?

Sodium valproate is used to reduce how often you have epileptic seizures. Epileptic seizures are caused by abnormal bursts of electrical activity in the brain. Sodium valproate works by reducing this abnormal electrical activity.

### What are the side effects?

Most people do not have side effects when they take this drug. However, sodium valproate can make some people feel sick or have stomach ache. It also may make some people feel shaky. Less commonly, it can cause hair loss, headache, diarrhoea, sleepiness, weight gain, hearing loss, lack of concentration and liver problems. If you experience any of these you should tell your doctor. You should not stop taking sodium valproate suddenly unless you are told to do so by a doctor.

### Are there any other risks?

Sodium valproate can cause problems if it is taken in pregnancy. Children whose mothers have taken sodium valproate during pregnancy are 30-40% more likely to have developmental problems like delays in talking or walking, poor language skills and memory problems than other children. Some studies have suggested children whose mothers took sodium valproate during pregnancy are three times more likely to have autism and 10% more likely to have congenital malformations like cleft palate compared with other children.

### How does this affect me/my child?

The Medicines and Health Regulatory Authority (MHRA) have recommended that sodium valproate should not be prescribed for girls, unless other treatments are not suitable. The Eastern Paediatric Epilepsy Network has discussed the above recommendation and has agreed that valproate could be prescribed to girls under 10 years of age. This is because many young girls grow out of their epilepsy as they become older, and sodium valproate is the most effective drug for some epilepsies. However, the risks and benefits of sodium valproate should be discussed again when they reach puberty. In older girls, it is very important to consider contraception. If a woman who takes sodium valproate is planning to become pregnant, it is very important that they talk to their doctor first. Boys who take sodium valproate do not need to worry about this – sodium valproate is not known to have any effect on their children.