



Carbamazepine

(Pronounce carb-a-maz-a-peen)

Why has carbamazepine been prescribed?

Carbamazepine is a mood stabiliser and anticonvulsant. These medications can be prescribed to treat mood disorders. It is also used to treat trigeminal neuralgia, a nerve pain condition which affects the face.

What are the benefits of taking carbamazepine?

Mood stabilisers are effective in reducing the severity of the symptoms of depression and mania. They also shorten the time to recovery and prevent depression and mania returning.

Are there any precautions with carbamazepine?

Carbamazepine is suitable for most people. As with all medicines, however, there are precautions. Your prescriber will usually check that it is safe to prescribe carbamazepine, but let your prescriber know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care may be needed:

- a) If you have epilepsy, glaucoma, porphyria, thyroid problems or suffer from heart, liver or kidney trouble.
- b) If you are taking any other medication especially anticoagulants such as warfarin, medication for schizophrenia, medication for anxiety or insomnia, medication for high blood pressure or irregular heart beat, antibiotics, antifungals such as itraconazole, fluconazole, ketoconazole and voriconazole, theophylline, cimetidine, steroids, isotretinoin, anticonvulsants, antidepressants, HRT or oral contraceptives or strong pain killers. Also, tell your prescriber if you buy any medicine 'over the counter' from a pharmacy or supermarket. Please also tell your prescriber if you take any alternative or complementary medicine such as Chinese herbal medicines. St John's Wort should not be taken by patients prescribed carbamazepine.
- c) If you are pregnant, breast feeding, or wish to become pregnant.
- d) If you eat grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice and are taking higher doses of carbamazepine you may experience more side effects.

What is the usual dose of carbamazepine?

The starting dose is usually 400mg daily. The dose is then usually slowly increased. The usual dose of carbamazepine may be between 400mg and 600mg daily up to a maximum of 1600mg daily. It may take some time to get to the dose that is most suitable.

How should carbamazepine be taken?

Carbamazepine is usually taken two or three times daily. However, you and your prescriber may decide that it is better for you to take the medicine at another time.

What form does carbamazepine come in?

Carbamazepine is available as tablets, chewable tablets, sustained release tablets, liquid and suppositories. The tablets are available as 100mg, 200mg and 400mg, the chewable tablets as 100mg and 200mg and the sustained release tablets as 200mg and 400mg. The liquid is available as 100mg per 5ml and the suppositories as 125mg and 250mg.

What should be done if a dose is missed?

If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If you miss a whole day's dose – just carry on as normal with the usual dose. If you miss more than a day's dose, speak to your prescriber.

What will happen when carbamazepine is first taken?

Carbamazepine, like many medicines, does not work straight away. For example, it may take several days or even weeks for some symptoms to improve. To begin with, some people find that carbamazepine may help them feel more calm and relaxed. Later, (after a few days or more) other symptoms should begin to improve. Many people do not experience any side effects. However some people may experience some side effects. We have listed potential side effects in the table below, whether or not they are likely to be short or long-term and what measures can be taken is also described. There are other possible side effects – we have listed only the most important ones. Ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if you are worried about anything else that you think might be a side effect. Further information on side effects is available in the official manufacturer's leaflet.

Reporting side effects

The 'Yellow Card' scheme encourages patients to report any side effects that they feel may be caused by their medication. Ask your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse for the forms if you wish to report any side effects. Alternatively, telephone 0808 100 3352 or go to www.mhra.gov.uk.

Is carbamazepine addictive?

Carbamazepine is not addictive, but if you stop taking the medicine suddenly, you may experience unpleasant physical feelings.

What about alcohol?

It is recommended that people taking carbamazepine should not drink alcohol. This is because both mood stabilisers and alcohol can cause drowsiness. If the two are taken together, severe drowsiness can result. This can lead to falls and accidents. As well as this, drinking alcohol may make mania, depression and anxiety worse. However, once people are used to taking medication, then *very small amounts* of alcohol may not be harmful. It pays to be very careful, because alcohol affects people in different ways, especially when they are taking medication. Never drink alcohol and drive. Discuss any concerns you have with your doctor, pharmacist or nurse.

Is it OK to stop taking carbamazepine when symptoms go away?

No. If you stop taking carbamazepine, your original symptoms are very likely to return. Most people need to remain on carbamazepine for quite a long time, sometimes years. You should always discuss with your prescriber any plans you have to reduce or stop any of your prescribed medicines.

Are there any alternatives to carbamazepine?

Yes, there are alternatives available. Although mood stabilisers have broadly similar therapeutic effects they differ in the side effects they produce. There are several mood stabilisers available so most people can find one which suits them. Psychological therapies can also help in bipolar disorder usually in addition to medication.

Further information

Carbamazepine can very rarely cause severe blood disorders and severe skin rash. If you experience any severe symptoms of rash, mouth ulcers, bruising, bleeding, sore throat or high temperature contact your prescriber straightaway.

Summary of side effects



Double vision - Common

What can be done about it?

These effects usually occur when carbamazepine is first started or when the dose is increased. Discuss with your prescriber if any persist. It may be necessary to alter the dose or preparation of carbamazepine.



Ataxia – Common (unsteadiness)

What can be done about it?

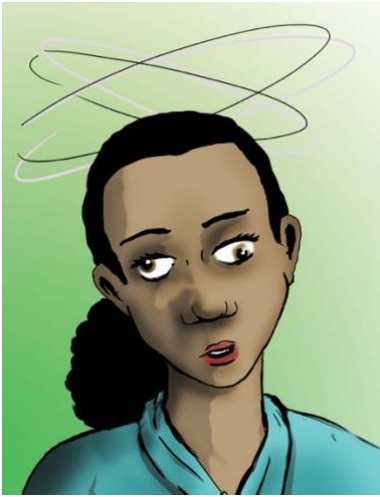
These effects usually occur when carbamazepine is first started or when the dose is increased. Discuss with your prescriber if any persist. It may be necessary to alter the dose or preparation of carbamazepine.



Nausea - Common

What can be done about it?

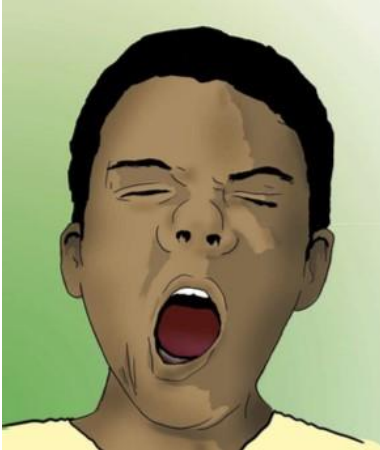
These effects usually occur when carbamazepine is first started or when the dose is increased. Discuss with your prescriber if any persist. It may be necessary to alter the dose or preparation of carbamazepine.



Dizziness – Common

What can be done about it?

These effects usually occur when carbamazepine is first started or when the dose is increased. Discuss with your prescriber if any persist. It may be necessary to alter the dose or preparation of carbamazepine.



Drowsiness - Common

What can be done about it?

These effects usually occur when carbamazepine is first started or when the dose is increased. Discuss with your prescriber if any persist. It may be necessary to alter the dose or preparation of carbamazepine.



Headache – Common

What can be done about it?

This should wear off within a few days. Paracetamol can be taken but discuss with your prescriber if this persists



Oedema – Common (swelling of ankles)

What can be done about it?

Tell your prescriber if this occurs.

Other (less common) side effects	How common is it and what can be done about it?
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Rash	Uncommon Contact your doctor, pharmacist or nurse for advice.
Dry mouth	Uncommon This should wear off within a few days. Sugar-free boiled sweets, chewing gum or eating citrus fruits may help. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.
Constipation	Uncommon Eat lots of fibre – fruit and vegetables are good sources. Drink plenty of fluids. Your prescriber may prescribe a laxative.
Sexual dysfunction – reduced libido (desire) and lack of orgasm in males and females. Impotence in males	Uncommon Any changes should be reported to your prescriber. It may be necessary to switch to another medication. Symptoms should go away when switched to another medication.
Increased appetite and weight gain	Uncommon Try to eat healthily and take exercise.
Loss of appetite	Uncommon This should wear off within a few days or weeks. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.
Blood dyscrasias (low white blood cells)	Uncommon Any sore throat or fever should be reported to your prescriber immediately.

Very common = almost everyone affected
Common = many people affected
Uncommon = some people affected

Rare = few people affected
Very rare = very few or no one affected

Disclaimer

This leaflet does not replace the official manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet.

For more information, visit www.slam.nhs.uk/meds or speak to a health care professional.

Leaflet supplied by: Medicines Information, Pharmacy Department, Maudsley Hospital, London SE5 8AZ | Telephone: 020 3228 2317

Artwork by: Oscar Millar (www.millarstratton.co.uk)