



# Valproate

(Pronounced val-pro-ate)

## Why has valproate been prescribed?

Valproate is a mood stabiliser and anticonvulsant. These medications can be prescribed to treat mood disorders.

## What are the benefits of taking valproate?

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 valproate?

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

- a) If you have epilepsy, diabetes, systemic lupus erythematosus, porphyria or suffer from 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 malaria), the antibiotic erythromycin and injected antibiotics, aspirin, cimetidine, anticonvulsants, HIV medication or antidepressants. 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 valproate.
- c) If you are pregnant, breast feeding, or wish to become pregnant.

## What is the usual dose of valproate?

The starting dose is usually between 400mg and 750mg daily. The dose is then usually slowly increased. The usual dose of valproate may be between 750mg and 2000mg daily. It may take some time to get to the dose that is most suitable.

## How should valproate be taken?

Valproate is usually taken once or twice daily. However, you and your prescriber may decide that it is better for you to take the medicine at another time.

## What form does valproate come in?

Valproate is available in different formulations. Sodium valproate (Epilim) is available as, crushable tablets, film coated tablets, sustained release tablets, liquid, syrup and injection. The crushable tablets are available as 100mg, the enteric coated tablets as 200mg and 500mg and the sustained release tablets as 200mg, 300mg and 500mg. The liquid is available as 200mg per 5ml, the syrup as 200mg per 5ml and the injection as a 400mg vial. Valproate semisodium (Depakote) is available as 250mg and 500mg tablets. Valproic acid (Convulex) is available as 150mg, 300mg and 500mg tablets.

## 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 the following day. If you miss more than a day's dose, speak to your prescriber.

## What will happen when valproate is first taken?

Valproate, 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 valproate may help them feel more calm and relaxed. Later, (usually 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](http://www.mhra.gov.uk).

## Is valproate addictive?

Valproate is not addictive, but if you stop taking the medicine suddenly, you may experience unpleasant physical feelings. Also stopping valproate suddenly is known to be associated with relapse.

## What about alcohol?

It is recommended that people taking valproate 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. Also, alcohol may alter the level of valproate in the blood. 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 valproate when symptoms go away?

No. If you stop taking valproate, your original symptoms are very likely to return. Most people need to remain on valproate 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 valproate?

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

Valproate can rarely cause severe blood disorders or liver disorders. If you experience any severe symptoms of vomiting, tiredness, jaundice, bruising or bleeding contact your prescriber immediately.

## Warning in pregnancy

If you are taking valproate you must not get pregnant without prior planning. Discuss any plans you have with your prescriber as you may need to switch treatment or require extra monitoring.

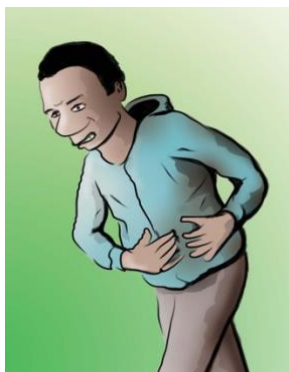
## Summary of side effects



**Nausea – Common** (with or without vomiting)

**What can be done about it?**

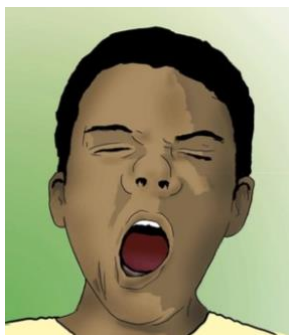
This usually occurs when valproate is started. Taking the medication with food or after food may help. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.



**Abdominal pain – Common**

**What can be done about it?**

This usually occurs when valproate is started. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists. It may be necessary to alter the dose or preparation of valproate.



**Drowsiness – Common**

**What can be done about it?**

This usually occurs when valproate is started. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists. It may be necessary to alter the dose or preparation of valproate.



**Increased appetite and weight gain – Common**

**What can be done about it?**

Try to eat healthily and take exercise.

Other (less common) side effects	How common is it and what can be done about it?
Ataxia (unsteadiness)	<p><b>Uncommon</b></p> <p>This usually occurs when valproate is started. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists. It may be necessary to alter the dose or preparation of valproate.</p>

Tremor (slight shaking of the hands)	<b>Uncommon</b> This usually occurs when valproate is started. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists. It may be necessary to alter the dose or preparation of valproate.
Hair loss	<b>Uncommon</b> This is usually temporary and may grow back curlier than before.
Blood dyscrasias (low white blood cells)	<b>Rare</b> Any sore throat or fever should be reported to your prescriber immediately.
Rash	<b>Rare</b> Contact your doctor, pharmacist or nurse for advice.
Liver damage	<b>Very rare</b> Report any signs of bruising or bleeding to your prescriber.

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](http://www.slam.nhs.uk/meds) or speak to a health care professional.

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