

Anti-Seizure Medicines (Antiepileptics)

MHRA Drug Safety Update | NICE NG217 (2022) | Valproate Pregnancy Prevention Programme

■ BRAND CONTINUITY

- **Category 1:** Always maintain the same brand. Never substitute without prescriber and patient agreement.
- **Category 2:** Maintain brand where possible. Discuss any switch with the prescriber first.
- **Category 3:** Switching is usually acceptable, but consider individual patient factors.
- **If the prescription does not specify a brand, follow usual practice and record what was supplied.**

Brand continuity guidance mainly applies to epilepsy treatment.

| Category | Brand Policy | Key Drugs |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| 1: Always maintain | Never switch without agreement | Phenytoin, Carbamazepine, Phenobarbital, Primidone |
| 2: Maintain where possible | Discuss switch with prescriber | Valproate, Lamotrigine, Topiramate, Oxcarbazepine, Clobazam, Clonazepam, Zonisamide, Perampanel |
| 3: Usually flexible | Switching generally acceptable | Levetiracetam, Lacosamide, Gabapentin, Pregabalin, Ethosuximide |

■ VALPROATE REQUIREMENTS

- Dispense in the original manufacturer pack. Do not re-pack into plain containers.
- Confirm patient card and Patient Information Leaflet are present.
- Women and girls of childbearing potential: Pregnancy Prevention Programme must be in place. Annual risk acknowledgement should be current.
- Valproate initiation requires specialist confirmation that Pregnancy Prevention Programme requirements are met.
- MHRA advises effective contraception for men taking valproate and their partners.

■ REPEAT DISPENSE CHECKS

- Confirm the brand and manufacturer match previous supplies. Record what was dispensed every time.
- Drug shortage: check the SPS Medicines Supply Tool. Contact the prescriber before switching Category 1 or Category 2 medicines.
- Ask: "Have you had any new or more frequent seizures since your last supply?"
- Ask valproate patients of childbearing potential: "Are you pregnant, planning a pregnancy, or could you become pregnant?"

■ RED FLAGS: ACT IMMEDIATELY

- Seizure lasting more than 5 minutes, or repeated seizures without recovery: call 999.
- New or increased seizure frequency after any brand or dose change: urgent prescriber review.
- Rash with carbamazepine or lamotrigine (especially widespread, blistering, or with fever): stop the medicine and attend A&E; immediately.
- Valproate toxicity (confusion, unsteadiness, drowsiness, vomiting, tremor): urgent medical assessment.
- Phenytoin toxicity (double vision, slurred speech, involuntary eye movements, unsteady gait): urgent medical assessment.
- Valproate patient reports pregnancy or possible pregnancy: refer urgently to the specialist team. Do not stop treatment suddenly unless advised by the specialist.

Key reminders: Never stop anti-seizure medicines suddenly; abrupt withdrawal can trigger status epilepticus. Carbamazepine: screen Han Chinese and Thai patients for HLA-B*1502 before starting (Stevens-Johnson syndrome risk). Enzyme-inducing medicines (carbamazepine, phenytoin, phenobarbital) can reduce the effectiveness of hormonal contraceptives. Any change in seizure control may affect driving entitlement.