

## **ANTIEPILEPTIC DRUGS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **ARE THERE ANY SIDE EFFECTS OF ANTIEPILEPTIC DRUGS?**

Every drug can have side effects. Older antiepileptic drugs tended to commonly cause side effects, especially dizziness and sleepiness, while these side effects are less common with newer drugs. These side effects go away when the drug is stopped or the dose reduced. Older drugs can rarely cause serious side effects, such as hepatitis or blood problems which are uncommon with most newer drugs. Most people do not have side effects but each individual differs in the way their body handles each drug.

### **WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE SIDE EFFECTS?**

Whatever the side effect is, do not stop taking your medication suddenly because this can cause more severe seizures. Discuss the side effects with your doctor. Sometimes the problem can be helped just by changing the time or dose of your medication.

### **WHAT SHOULD I TELL MY DOCTOR ABOUT MY OTHER MEDICATIONS?**

Tell you doctor if you are allergic to any medication or substances, if you are using any other medications or contraceptives, if you have kidney or liver disease, or if you are pregnant or breast feeding.

### **WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I MISS A DOSE?**

If you have missed taking a dose, try to take it as soon as you remember. If it is time to take your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to the regular schedule. Do not take a double dose. If you have missed more than one dose, check with your doctor. Keep a record of doses missed.

### **WHAT CAN I DO TO REMEMBER MY MEDICATIONS?**

Take your medications at the same time every day. One way to remember is to take them with meals, when arising and going to bed, or when brushing your teeth in the morning and at night. A wrist watch that alarms 3 or 4 times each day is available. A pill box is highly recommended for everyone taking medication more than once per day.

### **HOW CAN I STORE MY MEDICINES?**

Store the medicines away from children and away from moisture. Discard empty pill bottles. Do not store or carry your medication in old pill bottles because it will cause confusion for you and anyone involved in your care.

### **WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE VOMITING?**

Vomiting and diarrhea can affect the level of AEDs in your blood. If you have vomited soon after taking a dose, you could take another dose. If you vomit more than 45 minutes after your dose, then do not take it again unless instructed you by your doctor.

### **CAN I DRINK ALCOHOL WHEN TAKING AEDS.**

Consuming alcohol is a personal decision, but alcohol can exaggerate some of the side effects of antiepileptic drugs and antiepileptic drugs can also exaggerate the effects of alcohol. Therefore, it is especially important to consume it in moderation, if at all. Alcohol can cause some antiepileptic drugs to be less effective by lowering the blood level. Alcohol can occasionally precipitate seizures.

### **WHEN CAN I STOP TAKING MY MEDICATIONS?**

This depends on the cause of your epilepsy and will be decided between you and your doctor. You will discuss the risk of seizures happening again compared to the benefit of withdrawing medications. Most doctors do not withdraw medications until at least two years of seizure-freedom have passed. Some people outgrow their epilepsy and can stop taking medications. Some people have an underlying problem that continues to be present and should continue to take medications to suppress seizures even if they have not had a seizure for a long time.

### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I HAVE A SEIZURE AFTER WITHDRAWING MEDICATIONS?**

If you have a seizure again after stopping your medication, then tell your doctor. It is likely that your doctor will recommend that you start taking your medication again.

### **CAN I HAVE A DRIVER'S LICENSE IF I AM TAKING SEIZURE MEDICATIONS?**

Yes. There is no restriction on driving just for taking seizure medications. However, you must be free of seizures for 6 months before you can resume driving in Virginia.