

## **Patient Guide**

### **Contraception and Pregnancy When taking Valproate: what you should know**

#### **Patient Guide**

**This booklet is for girls and women of childbearing age (or their parent/legal guardian/caregiver) taking any medicine which contains valproate.**

**This includes brands such as Epilim, Sodium Valproate Sandoz, Valpro EC and Valproate Winthrop.**

- It contains key information about the risks of taking valproate during pregnancy.
- It is important to read this if your doctor has recommended valproate as the best treatment for you.
- The type of risks of using valproate during pregnancy is the same for all girls and women using valproate.

**Read this booklet along with the Consumer Medicines Information available from your pharmacist.**

- It is important that you read the leaflet even if you have been taking valproate for a while.
- This is because it contains the most up to date information on your medicine.

**You might find it helpful to talk about this booklet with your partner, friends and family. If you have any questions, please contact your doctor.**

**Keep this booklet. You may need to read it again.**

## 1- KEY INFORMATION TO REMEMBER

- Valproate is an effective medicine for epilepsy and mania.
- Valproate should only be taken by women or girls if other treatments don't control your condition or you are unable to tolerate them. This is because valproate can seriously harm an unborn child when taken during pregnancy. Whatever your illness, don't stop taking valproate unless your doctor tells you to do so.
- Always use effective contraception when taking valproate, to prevent unplanned pregnancy
  - Use contraception for the whole time you are taking valproate; your doctor will recommend effective contraception for you, or will refer you to someone to discuss further with.
  - Do not stop using the contraception at any time while taking valproate
- Schedule an urgent appointment with your doctor if you think you are pregnant – do not stop taking your valproate until you have discussed this with your doctor.
- Consult your doctor promptly if you are thinking about having a baby and do not stop using contraception until you have done so.
- Never stop taking valproate unless your doctor tells you because your illness may become worse.
- Remember to visit your specialist regularly- at least annually.
- During your visit, both you and your doctor will discuss the risks of valproate use during pregnancy. Remember to ask questions if there is something you don't understand.

## 3. WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF TAKING VALPROATE DURING PREGNANCY?

### Risks to your unborn child

If you take valproate when you are pregnant it can seriously harm your unborn child.

- The risks are higher with valproate than with other medicines for epilepsy or bipolar disorder.
- The risks are present even with smaller doses of valproate - the higher the dose the higher the risk.

### Taking valproate during pregnancy can cause serious birth defects.

In women in the general population:

- 2 to 3 babies in every 100 will have a birth defect.

In women who take valproate while pregnant:

- Around 10 babies in every 100 will have a birth defect.

### What type of birth defects can happen?

- Spina bifida - where the bones of the spine do not develop properly.
- Face and skull malformations - including 'cleft lip' and 'cleft palate'. This is where the upper lip or and bones in the face are split.
- Malformations of the limbs, heart, kidney, urinary tract and sexual organs.

**Taking valproate while pregnant could affect your child's development as they grow up.**

In women who take valproate while pregnant:

- Up to 30 to 40 children in every 100 may have problems with development.

The long-term effects are not known.

The following effects on development could be observed:

- Being late in learning to walk and talk.
- Lower intelligence than other children of the same age.
- Poor speech and language skills.
- Memory problems.

Children of mothers who take valproate in pregnancy are more likely to have autism or autistic spectrum problems.

The children may be more likely to having signs of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

## 6. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?

Please choose and read the situations which apply to you from the situations described below:

- I am starting treatment with valproate.
- I am taking valproate and not planning a family.
- I am taking valproate and planning a family.
- I am taking valproate and I have become pregnant.

### I am starting treatment with valproate

**Your doctor will explain you why they feel valproate is the right medicine for you and tell you about all the known risks:**

- If you are **too young to become pregnant**:
  - Your doctor should only treat you with valproate if nothing else works.
  - It is important that you and your parents/caregiver know about these risks of valproate when used during pregnancy. This is so you know what to do when you are old enough to have children.
  - You or your parents/caregivers should contact the specialist once you experience menarche during valproate use.
- If you are already **old enough to become pregnant**:
  - Your doctor should only treat you with valproate if you are not pregnant and you are using contraception.
  - Your doctor will ask you to perform a pregnancy test before starting valproate, or thereafter if needed. This is to make sure you are not pregnant.
  - Always use effective contraception when taking valproate:
    - Use contraception for the whole time you are taking valproate
    - Do not stop using the contraception at any time.Your doctor will recommend effective contraception for you.  
This is to make sure you do not become pregnant.
  - You will need to review your treatment with your doctor regularly, (at least each year).
  - At each visit, your doctor will discuss use of valproate during pregnancy with you, and recommendations on how to avoid becoming pregnant while taking valproate.
- If you decide **you want to start a family**, talk to your doctor about this as soon as possible:
  - Do not stop valproate or using contraception - until you have been able to discuss this with your doctor.
  - You need to talk to your doctor about the risks for your baby's health while keeping your illness under control.

- You and your doctor should agree on what to do with your treatment before you start trying for a baby.

## **I am taking valproate and not planning a family**

Always use effective contraception if you are taking valproate and do not plan to have a baby.

- Use contraception for the whole time you are taking valproate
- Do not stop using the contraception at any time.

Talk to your doctor or gynaecologist/obstetrician or midwife/professional at the family planning clinic if you need advice on the method of contraception.

Consult your doctor at once if you think you are pregnant.

Never stop taking valproate until you have discussed this with your doctor even in case you have become pregnant as it can be dangerous for you and your baby.

You will need to review your treatment with your doctor regularly, (at least each year).

During the annual visit, your doctor will discuss the risks related to the use of valproate during pregnancy with you, and recommendations on how you may avoid becoming pregnant while taking valproate.

## **I am taking valproate and planning a family**

**If you are planning a baby, first talk to your doctor but:**

- **Keep taking valproate**
- **Keep using contraception until you have talked with your doctor.**

It is important that you do not become pregnant until you and your doctor have talked.

- Your doctor may need to change your medicine a long time before you become pregnant – this is to make sure your illness is stable.
- You need to talk about what can be done to reduce the risks for your baby's health while keeping your illness under control.
- Ask your doctor about taking folic acid when planning to have a baby. Folic acid can lower the general risk of spina bifida and early miscarriage that exists with all pregnancies. However, it is unlikely that it will reduce the risk of birth defects associated with valproate use.

You will need to review your treatment with your doctor regularly, (at least each year).

During this visit your doctor will re-review with you all the risks and recommendations related to the use of valproate during pregnancy.

## **I am taking valproate and I have become pregnant**

If you think you may be pregnant:

**Do not stop taking valproate** - this is because your epilepsy or bipolar disorder may become worse.

**Talk promptly to your doctor.** This is so that you can talk about your options. Your doctor may tell you that you may need to switch to another treatment and will explain how to make the transition from valproate to this new treatment.

The babies of mothers who take valproate during pregnancy are at a higher risk of:

- birth defects and
- developing and learning problems.

These can both seriously affect your child's life.

In some circumstances, it may not always be possible to switch to another treatment. Please refer to your doctor for additional information.

During this visit your doctor will discuss with you all the risks and recommendations related to the use of valproate during pregnancy. You will be monitored very closely:

- This is to make sure your illness is controlled.
- It is also to check how your baby is developing.