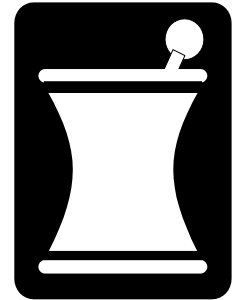


Carbamazepine (car-bam-ay-se-peen) 'Tegretol'

Patient Information - Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy

Why have I been prescribed carbamazepine?

Carbamazepine is used to help treat and prevent mood swings, which occur in bipolar affective disorder. People with bipolar affective disorder have mood swings that are much more severe than the small changes in mood that everybody experiences. With bipolar affective disorder, mood may be elevated or depressed (up or down).



When the mood is extremely elevated this is called hypomania or mania. People with hypomania often have lots of energy. They can feel elated or feel irritable and frustrated. They may talk very quickly, sleep very little and be full of ideas and plans. They can be described as being "high". Treatment is usually needed because when people are "high", they may make poor decisions and can quickly become exhausted. Periods of depression will also occur in bipolar affective disorder. Symptoms include feelings of sadness, tiredness and poor sleep. Occasionally antidepressants are used to help overcome these feelings.

Carbamazepine helps stabilise the mood and helps even out the highs and lows.

What exactly is carbamazepine?

Carbamazepine is known as a mood stabiliser but it can be used to treat other disorders. Many people with epilepsy take it to stop them having fits or seizures. Carbamazepine may also help depression when taken with other antidepressants.

Your pharmacy stocks different brands of carbamazepine tablets. If your doctor prescribes the 'controlled release' tablet make sure you get this one every time from your pharmacist. A common brand or trade name of carbamazepine is Tegretol™.

Why do I need to have some blood tests?

If you are of certain ethnicities, you may have your blood tested for genes called HLA-A*3101 and HLA-B*1502 alleles. People with these genes are at a higher risk for some carbamazepine side effects (especially some serious skin reactions).

- Navajo and Sioux, South American, Tamil Nadu, Japanese and Arabic populations for HLA-A*3101 alleles
- Han Chinese and Thai populations for HLA-B*1502 alleles

Your blood will also be tested to check that you have a healthy number of red blood cells and white blood cells.

Your doctor will also conduct blood tests to check that the levels of carbamazepine in your blood are correct. If your doctor is satisfied with the results, you will only need a blood test every three to six months.

Is carbamazepine safe to take?

It is usually safe to have carbamazepine regularly as prescribed by your doctor, but it doesn't suit everyone.

Let your doctor know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care may be needed:

- If you have glaucoma, porphyria, or suffer from heart, liver or kidney trouble.
- If you are pregnant, breastfeeding, or wish to become pregnant.
- If you have ever had any problems affecting your bone marrow
- If you are allergic to carbamazepine or tricyclic antidepressants

How should I take carbamazepine and what should I do if I miss a dose?

Look at the label on your medicine. It should have all the necessary instructions on it. Follow this advice carefully. If you have any questions, speak to your pharmacist, doctor or nurse. Never change your dose without checking with your doctor. If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember, as long as it is within a few hours of the usual time.

What will happen to me when I start taking carbamazepine?

For most people with bipolar affective disorder, highs and lows occur infrequently, so it may take months or years to see the effects of carbamazepine. The best way to know whether carbamazepine is working for you is to compare your highs and lows before and whilst taking it.

Some people may get side effects before they start to feel better. Most side effects should go away after a few weeks. Sometimes, the level of carbamazepine in your body gets too high which can be dangerous. You need to be able to spot the side effects that can mean a high level of carbamazepine. The table tells you what to do if you get any side effects. Not everyone will get the side effects shown. There are many other possible side effects. Ask your pharmacist, doctor or nurse if you are worried about anything else that you think might be a side effect.

Are there any medicines or foods I should avoid to take care with?

Carbamazepine can interact with a range of medicines which include the oral contraceptive pill, theophylline, St John's Wort, some antidepressants, some cough mixtures, and grapefruit juice.

Always consult your doctor or pharmacist before starting a new medicine or buying a medicine over the counter.

What about alcohol?

It is recommended that people taking carbamazepine should not drink alcohol. This is because both carbamazepine and alcohol can cause drowsiness. If the two are taken at the same time, severe drowsiness can result. This can lead to falls or accidents.

As well as this, drinking alcohol often makes your mood unstable. Excessive drinking is especially likely to do this. Once people are used to taking medication, they can sometimes drink alcohol in small amounts without any harm.

Avoid alcohol altogether for the first one or two months. After this, if you want a drink, try a glass of your normal drink and see how you feel.

If this doesn't make you feel drowsy, then it is probably okay to drink small amounts. It pays to be very cautious because alcohol affects people in different ways, especially when they are taking medication.

Don't stop taking your medication because you fancy a drink at the weekend. If you do drink alcohol, drink only small amounts. Never drink any alcohol and drive while on carbamazepine.

Discuss any concerns you may have with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

When I feel better, can I stop taking it?

No. If you stop taking carbamazepine, your original symptoms may return. You should decide with your doctor when you can come off it. Most people need to be on carbamazepine for quite a long time, sometimes years. This is not thought to be harmful. Carbamazepine is not addictive.

Side effect	What is it?	What should I do if this happens to me?
COMMON		
Dry mouth	Your mouth will feel dry and you will not produce much saliva (spit). Dry mouth can cause problems with speech, taste, chewing and swallowing. It can also increase the risk of getting dental decay and infection in your mouth.	To help prevent dental problems sip water regularly to moisten your mouth. Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. Avoid sugary drinks and snacks between meals. Try sugar free chewing gum to stimulate saliva or discuss using an oral lubricant with your pharmacist or dentist.
Diplopia	Seeing double.	Don't drive or use machinery. You won't need new glasses. Talk to your doctor about this.
Dizziness	Feeling light-headed and faint.	Don't stand up too quickly. Try and lie down when you feel it coming on. Don't drive.
Drowsiness	Feeling sleepy or sluggish. It can last for a few hours after taking your dose.	Don't drive or use machinery. Ask your doctor if you can take your carbamazepine at a different time of the day.

LESS COMMON		
Nausea and vomiting	Feeling sick or being sick.	Taking each dose with or after food may help. If it is bad, contact your doctor. The slow release tablets may help.
UNCOMMON		
Ataxia	Being very unsteady on your feet.	Your carbamazepine dose may be too high. Contact your doctor now.
Headache	When your head is painful and pounding.	It should be safe to take aspirin or paracetamol.
RARE		
Hypersensitivity Reactions	Red rash, fever, sore throat, mouth ulcers, joint pain, difficulty breathing, bruising or bleeding.	Stop taking the carbamazepine and contact your doctor immediately.
Confusion	Your mind is all mixed up.	Your carbamazepine dose may be too high. Contact your doctor now.
Constipation	Feeling “bunged up” inside. You can’t pass a bowel motion.	Eat more fibre e.g. bran, fruit and vegetables. Spend more time walking. Make sure you drink plenty of fluid. A mild laxative from pharmacy might help.
Diarrhoea	The “runs” or loose bowel motions.	This should wear off fairly quickly. If it becomes a problem, contact your pharmacist or doctor.
Rash	A mild red rash seen anywhere on the skin.	If mild, discuss with your doctor when you next meet. If it worsens, contact your doctor now.
SIADH (A low level of sodium in the blood)	Feeling generally unwell, lethargic or tired, confusion.	This can be dangerous. See your doctor soon.

Remember, leaflets like this can only describe some of the effects of medication. You may also find other books or leaflets useful. If you have access to the internet, you may find a lot of information there as well. Be careful as internet-based information is not always accurate.

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