

Valproate

Depakote / Depakote ER · divalproex and valproic acid

For mania, certain seizures or migraine prevention. Blood tests and pregnancy planning are essential.

From Jeffrey Panko, PMHNP-BC's education collection ·

Draft for review · Clinical content has not been revalidated for this website.

FOLLOW YOUR EXACT PRODUCT

KEEP YOUR BLOOD TESTS

Regular, delayed-release and extended-release products have different schedules.

What it is used for

Divalproex tablets treat mania in bipolar disorder. Your team may continue treatment to help prevent future episodes.

Certain products also treat seizures or prevent migraines. They do not stop an active migraine. Ask which goal applies to you.

How it works

Valproate reduces overactive nerve signaling, partly through effects on the brain's calming GABA system.

The full mood mechanism is not settled. Your team judges benefit by symptoms and daily life, not by sleepiness alone.

What to expect over time

FIRST DAYS

Mania may start improving. Nausea, sleepiness or tremor can also appear.

FIRST WEEKS

Your team reviews blood levels, symptoms and side effects to adjust treatment.

ONGOING

Keep lab checks and visits. Report weight, bleeding, menstrual or thinking changes.

Taking your medication

Follow your label at consistent times; food may ease nausea. ER is usually once daily; other forms use divided doses.

Swallow DR/ER tablets whole. Sprinkle capsules may be opened onto soft food; swallow immediately without chewing the beads.

Do not switch products yourself. Ask exactly when to take your dose before a blood-level test.

When to get help

Urgent care: severe belly pain, repeated vomiting, yellow skin/eyes, dark urine, unusual bleeding or new confusion/heavy drowsiness.

New rash: stop and call immediately. Blisters, sores or fever need urgent care. Call 911 for throat swelling, breathing trouble, collapse or immediate suicide danger.

Possible pregnancy: call your prescriber now to plan treatment. Do not stop on your own.

Early side effects

Nausea, stomach upset, tremor, dizziness, sleepiness and unsteadiness can occur. Avoid driving until you know your response. Persistent foggy needs review, even if a blood level looks normal.

Other effects to discuss

Weight gain, hair thinning, irregular periods, acne or excess hair growth can occur. Tell your team early. Do not start high-dose hair supplements on your own; some interfere with blood tests.

What to keep track of

Keep liver tests, blood counts/platelets and drug levels on schedule, especially early and after dose changes. Report warning symptoms between tests; normal results do not rule out serious reactions.

Before you start

Tell your team about liver/pancreatic disease, bleeding, unexplained confusion, inherited metabolic disorders and all medicines. Discuss pregnancy, contraception, plans to father a child and breastfeeding. Ask which alternatives were considered and how you will obtain blood tests.

Medicines & interactions

Lamotrigine & seizure medicines

Valproate raises lamotrigine levels and serious-rash risk; its dose schedule must change. Topiramate can add confusion or high ammonia. Check starts and stops with your team.

Aspirin & blood thinners

Aspirin can raise active valproate. Blood thinners and anti-inflammatory pain medicines can add bleeding risk. Ask before use; do not stop prescribed treatment yourself.

Antibiotics, hormones & CBD

Carbapenem antibiotics can sharply lower valproate. Hormonal products and other medicines may change levels; CBD can add liver risk. Check every new medicine or supplement.

Alcohol & sedating medicines

Avoid alcohol. Opioids, anxiety medicines and sleep aids can add dangerous drowsiness. Report sleepwalking or other activities you do not remember after a sleep medicine.

Everyday tips

Use a dose and laboratory calendar.

Track sleep, mood, weight and your treatment goal.

Tell surgical and dental teams you take valproate.

Bring a complete medicine and supplement list.

Your questions, answered

What if I miss a dose?

Take it when remembered unless nearly time for the next; skip then. Never double. Ask your team after more than a day missed.

Can I stop when I feel better?

Not on your own. Sudden stopping can bring back symptoms or seizures. A planned taper may also require changes to other medicines.

What about pregnancy?

Valproate can cause serious birth defects and developmental harm. Use effective contraception if pregnancy is possible, and plan alternatives before conception. Folic acid does not remove the risk.

What about fathering a child or nursing?

Ask before trying for a baby: fertility effects and possible paternal risks need discussion. Breastfeeding may be possible; report infant jaundice, unusual bruising or bleeding.

Storage & safety

Store securely at room temperature, away from moisture and children; do not share. For overdose, call Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 immediately. Call 911 for collapse, seizure, breathing trouble or inability to wake.

About this information

For general information only; not a substitute for individualized medical advice. This sheet does not cover every risk or interaction. Ask your prescriber or pharmacist before changing how you take this medication.

Sources

1. <https://www.rxabbvie.com/pdf/depakote.PDF>
 2. <https://www.rxabbvie.com/pdf/dep3.pdf>
 3. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/valproate-reproductive-risks>
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Educational inclusion does not mean this medication or its indications are treated at this practice. Review the guide for your exact product with your prescriber or pharmacist.

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