

Zonisamide

Zonegran • Zonisade

An add-on seizure medicine. If it is prescribed for another reason, ask what benefit to look for.

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

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

BUILD THE DOSE SLOWLY

DO NOT STOP OR CHANGE IT YOURSELF

Your prescription sets your dose. Kidney function and other medicines can change what is right for you.

What it is used for

Zonisamide is approved with other medicines for focal seizures; US use below age 16 is not approved. It is not a cure for epilepsy.

Sometimes it is used for weight or binge-eating symptoms. These uses are not FDA-approved, and benefit must be weighed against side effects. It is not a proven bipolar treatment.

How it works

It changes how some electrical signals travel through nerve cells. This may help limit seizure activity; the full mechanism is not settled.

It also affects the body's acid balance. This can cause kidney stones or other problems, which is why blood tests matter even when you feel well.

What to expect over time

STARTING

The dose starts low; sleepiness or dizziness may appear early.

DOSE CHANGES

Usually spaced at least two weeks apart so effects can settle.

FOLLOW-UP

Track the symptom being treated, thinking, mood and side effects.

Taking your medication

Take it at the prescribed times, with or without food. Swallow capsules whole. Do not increase or combine doses yourself.

For prescribed Zonisade liquid, shake well and use the measuring device provided. Discard the opened bottle after 30 days.

Plan refills ahead. Keep hydrated unless your team limits fluids, and avoid overheating. Discuss a safe fluid plan if you have heart or kidney disease.

When to get help

Get urgent help: a blistering rash, mouth sores, facial swelling, fever with rash, eye pain or sudden blurred vision. Call 911 for breathing trouble or collapse.

Seek prompt assessment: fast breathing, unusual exhaustion, confusion, overheating with little sweating, blood in urine or severe back/abdominal pain.

Call your team now: a new rash, suicidal thoughts, severe mood changes, unusual bruising or fever. Call 911 for immediate danger or seizures lasting over five minutes.

Early side effects

Sleepiness, dizziness, nausea and poor balance may occur. Wait to drive or do hazardous work until your response and seizure plan allow it.

Other effects to discuss

Report memory, word-finding, mood or appetite changes. Weight loss is not always a benefit; tell your team if eating becomes difficult.

What to keep track of

Keep blood-test visits for kidney function and acid balance. Report changes in thinking, mood, weight, sweating or vision. Do not wait for your next routine visit if symptoms are severe.

Before you start

Tell your team about sulfa-drug allergies, kidney or liver disease, stones, breathing problems, depression and all medicines or supplements. Discuss pregnancy and breastfeeding before treatment. Zonisamide may harm a developing baby; use effective contraception during treatment and for one month after stopping. If pregnancy occurs, call promptly without suddenly stopping seizure treatment. It enters breast milk, so feeding and infant monitoring need a plan.

Medicines & interactions

Other seizure medicines

Some change zonisamide levels. Valproate and topiramate can also increase the risk of serious confusion from high ammonia. Let your team manage any combination changes.

Acid balance & heat

Topiramate, acetazolamide, ketogenic diets and some drugs that reduce sweating add risks. Ask before starting a new diet or medicine.

Alcohol & sedatives

Alcohol, opioids, sleep medicines and other sedating drugs can worsen impairment. Avoid alcohol and check before adding anything that makes you sleepy.

New drugs & supplements

Rifampin and St John's wort can change medicine levels. Have your pharmacist check prescriptions, nonprescription drugs and supplements; ask about grapefruit too.

Everyday tips

Use reminders and arrange refills before running out.

Keep a brief record of symptoms and side effects.

Carry water and avoid prolonged heat exposure.

Discuss problems early; you do not need to push through them.

Your questions, answered

What if I miss a dose?

Ask your pharmacist for instructions for your exact schedule. Never double the next dose. If several doses were missed, contact your prescriber before restarting.

Can I stop when I feel better?

Not suddenly. Your team will plan a gradual reduction when appropriate. A severe reaction needs urgent care and specific instructions, not a routine taper.

Does weight loss mean it is treating my mood?

No. Appetite and weight effects do not establish benefit for bipolar disorder. Agree on the actual treatment goal and how you will measure it.

What about pregnancy or nursing?

Discuss alternatives and the pregnancy registry with your team. If nursing continues, watch for unusual sleepiness, poor feeding or growth, low muscle tone and fever.

Storage & safety

Store securely at room temperature, away from excess heat, moisture, children and pets. Never share. For overdose, call Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 immediately; call 911 for collapse, seizures, 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://dailymed.nlm.nih.gov/dailymed/drugInfo.cfm?setid=d12de43e-3ac3-4335-bc85-70d7366a91eb>
 2. <https://dailymed.nlm.nih.gov/dailymed/drugInfo.cfm?setid=ac16fa15-32e9-4f92-8bc6-d8d41ae002c6>
 3. <https://medlineplus.gov/druginfo/meds/a603008.html>
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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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