



Pregabalin and Gabapentin



Why should I worry about them?

Gabapentinoids, such as pregabalin and gabapentin, were originally designed to treat epilepsy. Today, they are also prescribed for nerve pain and certain types of anxiety.

While they can be helpful and effective for many, these drugs come with risks such as:

- Potential for dependence or misuse
- Drowsiness, sedation, and slowed breathing (respiratory depression)

Please speak to your healthcare provider if you are considering pregnancy.

What should I be aware of?

Deaths involving pregabalin or gabapentin have risen sharply in recent years. Many of these deaths involve the use of opioids (such as codeine, methadone, morphine) at the same time.

Combining opioids with pregabalin or gabapentin increases the risk of breathing problems. This risk is higher for people who:

- Are over the age of 65
- Have breathing problems or neurological diseases
- Have kidney problems
- Are taking other sedative medications/alcohol.

What support is available to me?

- **Horizons (Bristol)** - visit <https://www.horizonsbristol.co.uk/>
- **We are with You (North Somerset)** - visit <https://www.wearewithyou.org.uk/local-hubs/north-somerset> or call 01934 427940
- **Developing Health & Independence (South Gloucestershire)** - visit <https://www.dhi-online.org.uk/get-help/south-gloucestershire-drug-and-alcohol-service> or call 0800 073 3011
- **FRANK national drug and alcohol support service** - find help near you at www.talktofrank.com, call 0300 123 6600, or text 82111
- **PostScript 360 (Bristol-based charity)** - visit <https://www.postscript360.org.uk/> or call the support line on 01179 663629

These organisations may not always be able to provide direct support but can signpost to useful information, connect you to support groups, provide naloxone, and offer other relevant resources.

What side effects might I experience?

Gabapentin and pregabalin can sometimes cause unpleasant side effects, such as:

- Severe breathing problems
- Irritability or aggression
- Anxiety or feeling on edge
- Loss of sex drive or erectile dysfunction
- Blurred vision and headaches
- Increased appetite
- Dependence or demanding behaviour
- Difficulty urinating
- Confusion or memory loss
- Weight changes and water retention.

If you're worried about your medications or side effects, speak to your healthcare provider.

How can I stay safe?

- **Follow your prescription** - take gabapentinoids exactly as prescribed. Never adjust your dose without speaking to your healthcare provider. Follow any reduction plan
- **Avoid mixing medicines (prescribed and non prescribed)** - tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines or supplements you take to avoid harmful interactions
- **Ask about naloxone** - if you are at higher risk of overdose your healthcare provider may recommend naloxone if you take opioids alongside gabapentinoids. This medicine can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. Ask if naloxone is right for you.
- **Know the warning signs** - **call 999** immediately if you notice:
 - Slow, shallow, or difficult breathing
 - Extreme drowsiness or confusion
 - Sudden changes in mood or behaviour.
- **Do not stop pregabalin or gabapentin suddenly**, especially if you have epilepsy. Your healthcare provider can provide support to reduce your medicines safely, if appropriate.

Your safety comes first

If you are taking gabapentinoids and opioids - whether prescribed or not - your healthcare provider will carefully review your treatment and make a plan with you.

They might:

- Reduce doses or stop certain medicines (a process called 'de-prescribing') to improve safety
- Suggest alternative treatments, including non-medication options.

This resource is aimed at people taking pregabalin or gabapentin, as well as an opioid, to highlight the potential risks, but may be useful for all patients on these medications.