

Valproic Acid (say val-pro-ick ah-sid) and Divalproex (say dive-al-pro-ex)

What is valproic acid and divalproex?

Divalproex is broken down into valproic acid in the stomach.

These medicines stabilize a person's moods. We commonly use them to treat bipolar disorder. Sometimes, we use them to treat seizures and to prevent or reduce migraines.

You are taking this medicine for:

- Bipolar Disorder
- Other: _____

How does valproic acid and divalproex work?

Bipolar disorder can happen when the chemicals in your brain are out-of-balance. This causes you to have different types of mood swings. These can last several days or longer and might include:

- Mania – uncontrollable racing thoughts, less need for sleep, risky behavior, feeling irritable, feeling invincible or on top of the world, rapid speech
- Depression - feeling hopeless, poor sleep, poor appetite, negative thoughts, trouble concentrating, no interest in activities you once enjoyed, thoughts of death or suicide

Valproic acid/Divalproex works by restoring the balance of the brain's chemicals, which can help:

- reduce symptoms of mania or depression
- reduce how often mania or depression happens and how long it lasts
- reduce how often you need to be in the hospital due to manic or depressive episodes
- improve sleep

How quickly will it start working?

Some symptoms of bipolar disorder might get better before others.

- To treat a new episode of mania, it can take a few days for you to respond to the medicine.
- To stabilize your mood, it can take a few weeks to months before you feel the full effects of this medicine.

How do I take this medicine?

- Take this medicine regularly as prescribed.
- You can take it with or without food but taking it with food might help reduce upset stomach.
- Swallow the medicine whole with a glass of water. Do not crush or chew.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as possible. If it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and return to your regular schedule.
- Do not take 2 doses at the same time.
- If your prescriber has sent you to have your blood tested for the amount of valproic acid in your body and you usually take a dose of this medicine in the morning, take your morning dose after your blood test.

Why is it important to keep taking it?

- Always take the amount you are supposed to take.
- Do not change how much you take or stop taking it without talking to your prescriber.
- If you do not take it as prescribed, the amount of valproic acid in your body can get too low, making it not work as well to treat your symptoms.

What should I look out for?

Here are some possible side effects and what to do if you notice them.

Common Side Effects



- a) **Upset stomach** (nausea)
Eat small meals more often during the day.
Take this medicine with food and water.



- b) **Drowsy**
Take this medicine at bedtime to reduce daytime drowsiness. It is dangerous to drive or operate machines when drowsy.



- c) **Dizzy**
Take your time getting up from a sitting or lying position.
Keep hydrated by drinking fluids. Water is best.
Limit how much alcohol you drink.



- d) **Weight gain**
Choose healthy foods and exercise regularly.



- e) **Shakiness of the hands** (fine tremors)
This is common and usually goes away with time.
If it gets worse or does not go away, this could mean your dose is too high. See your prescriber as soon as possible.



- f) **Feeling confused**
This can mean your dose is too high.
Tell your prescriber or pharmacist if you feel confused, or have more trouble remembering or concentrating than usual.



- g) **Acne**
Talk to your prescriber or pharmacist if this happens.



- h) **Hair thinning or hair loss**
Talk to your prescriber or pharmacist if this happens.



- i) **Changes in menstrual periods**
This medicine can change when your periods happen or make you miss your period.
Talk to your prescriber or pharmacist if this happens.

Rare but Serious Side Effects

1. Liver damage

This medicine can damage your liver.

Early symptoms include feeling very tired all the time and an upset stomach (nausea).

Serious symptoms include throwing up (vomiting), yellow skin or eyes, or dark coloured pee.

2. Damage to the pancreas

This medicine can damage your pancreas.

Early symptoms include upper abdominal pain that feels worse after eating, and weight loss.

Serious symptoms include intense abdominal pain, vomiting, and fever.

3. Low blood cells

This medicine can cause you to have low blood cells.

This includes:

a. Anemia (say *ah-nee-me-ah*)

This means having low red blood cells.

Symptoms of low red blood cells include feeling dizzy and tired.

b. Neutropenia (say *new-tro-pee-knee-ah*)

This means having low white blood cells.

Having low white blood cells can increase your risk of infection. Watch for signs of infection such as fever, sore throat, or feeling like you are getting the flu.

c. Thrombocytopenia (say *throm-boe-sight-oh-pee-nee-ah*)

This means having low platelets. Symptoms include easy bruising, bleeding that takes longer to stop, bright red or dark red blood in your stool, or feeling tired. Serious symptoms include fainting, throwing up blood, a really bad headache, sudden blurred vision, or weakness to one side of the body.

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This information does not replace the advice given to you by your healthcare provider.

Rare but Serious Side Effects - *continued*

4. Skin Reactions

This medicine can cause a severe rash that can become life threatening.

Early symptoms include unexplained skin pain and a red or purple skin rash that spreads.

Serious symptoms include fever, blisters on your skin, on the inside of your mouth, nose, eyes, and genitals, and the shedding of your skin.

When should I get help?

See your prescriber as soon as possible if you notice any of the following:

- Your symptoms of bipolar disorder are getting worse or returning.
- You are feeling hopeless or you feel that there is no way to solve the problem or end the pain.
- Any of the common side effects do not go away or get worse.
- You notice any of the symptoms of the rare but serious side effects.

Go to the nearest Emergency Department if any of these happen:

- You feel like acting on thoughts of harming yourself or others.
- You notice early symptoms of bleeding.
- You notice serious symptoms of hepatotoxicity or pancreatitis.

Call 911 if you notice serious symptoms of bleeding.

What else should I know?

Your prescriber might send you to get blood tests to check the amount of valproic acid in your body. Blood tests are also important to check for serious side effects of valproic acid and divalproex.

Other medicines can change how divalproex works.

Always check with your prescriber or pharmacist before taking any other medicines, including medicines you get with or without a prescription, herbal medicines, and supplements.

Valproic acid/divalproex can cause harm to a developing baby during pregnancy. Women taking these medicines should speak to their prescriber about birth control options and make sure they are using birth control while on these medicines.

It's good to ask questions

Anytime you have any questions or concerns about taking this medicine, talk with one of your healthcare team.

Call 811 (HealthLinkBC) after hours, and for any other health or medicine advice.

HealthLinkBC is open 24 hours a day and available in 130 languages. For an interpreter, say your language in English. Wait until an interpreter comes on the phone.

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