

## Gabapentin for Trigeminal Neuralgia

*\*A guide for patients\**

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### What is Gabapentin?

Gabapentin (brand name: Neurontin) is a medication often used to treat nerve pain, including trigeminal neuralgia. While it's not a first-line treatment, it is effective in 50 – 60% patients who cannot tolerate other medications or need additional pain control. Gabapentin is also used for seizures and other types of chronic nerve pain.

### How It Works

Gabapentin works blocking certain calcium channels, affecting the way nerves send messages in the brain and spinal cord. It doesn't act directly on the trigeminal nerve, but it calms overactive nerve signals by interacting with calcium channels in nerve cells.

In plain terms: it lowers the 'chatter' between nerves that might be misfiring and causing pain.

### Typical Dosing and Escalation

- Starting dose: Usually 100 mg to 300 mg at bedtime.
- Tablet sizes: 100 mg, 300 mg and 400 mg capsules, and 600 mg or 800 mg tablets
- Dose escalation: The dose is increased every 3 to 7 days to minimize side effects, often adding one dose at a time (morning, midday, evening).
- Target dose: Most people don't experience significant pain relief until a dose of 900 mg per day, though often require 1800 mg per day, divided into 2 or 3 doses. Sometimes 3600 mg per day is needed. The dose is tailored to each patient based on how well it works and what side effects occur.
- Gabapentin typically takes a few weeks to have its maximal effect
- Always follow your doctor's instructions. Never change the dose or stop the medication without medical advice.

### Common Side Effects

Gabapentin is generally well-tolerated, with side effects self-resolving in time, but may include:

- Drowsiness or fatigue
- Dizziness or light headedness
- Swelling in the legs or feet
- Weight gain
- Difficulty concentrating or memory issues

- Gabapentin can be addictive in a small group of people. If you have a history of addiction to any drugs or medication, please advise your doctor.
- Like most of the medications used to treat trigeminal neuralgia, gabapentin may be teratogenic (Category C) and should be avoided in pregnancy when possible.

### Important Tips

- Take with or without food.
- Take consistently and do not skip doses.
- Avoid alcohol, driving or operating heavy machinery until you know how it affects you.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember — but skip it if it's almost time for the next one.
- Do not stop suddenly — this can cause withdrawal symptoms.
- Inform your doctor of all other medications and supplements.

### Final Word

Gabapentin can be a helpful option in managing trigeminal neuralgia, especially for those who cannot tolerate the first line drugs carbamazepine and oxcarbazepine. Its effects build over time, so patience and careful dose adjustments are important. The key is to start low, go slow, and stay in touch with your care team about how you're feeling.

If you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to reach out.