

# Advice for service users who can't get Pregabalin or Gabapentin during COVID-19



BETTER HEALTH STARTS WITH YOU!

We understand it has become increasingly difficult for you to access pregabalin or gabapentin during COVID-19. Please see below some frequently asked questions which may help you throughout these difficult times.

## Can Gabapentin and Pregabalin cause withdrawal symptoms?

People who take these drugs on a daily basis, across a long period of time, and then suddenly stop can experience withdrawal symptoms. This is especially noticeable when these drugs are taken in larger doses.

Symptoms include nausea, diarrhoea, headache, feeling anxious, sweats, and difficulty sleeping. Seizures or fits can also occur, however, we cannot be certain of this.

If you have been taking gabapentin and pregabalin on an 'as and when' basis you should not experience these symptoms.

## What if I am prescribed Pregabalin or Gabapentin by my Doctor?

If you are prescribed pregabalin or gabapentin by your GP or specialist and are unsure about continuing this medication, please speak to your GP or specialist. **DO NOT** stop taking these drugs without medical advice.



**Remember:** GP surgeries and pharmacies are still open during the COVID-19 pandemic. You are still able to order and collect prescribed medication.

## What if I am taking Pregabalin or Gabapentin bought "on the street"?

Spectrum does not advocate the use of illegal drugs and we do not recommend buying off the street.

Where possible you must avoid suddenly stopping the use of pregabalin or gabapentin.

# Advice for service users who can't get Pregabalin or Gabapentin during COVID-19 (continued)



## Managing supplies and shortages

If you are concerned your supply may dry up, try to plan ahead. Take into account the amount you have left, and how you could use them to wean yourself off as gradually as possible.

The usual advice is to reduce your daily dose of pregabalin by 100mg every week. For gabapentin you are advised to reduce the daily dose by 300mg every four days.

This advice may be difficult to follow if you don't have a large supply left. This is particularly relevant for pregabalin where reduction amount depends on the strength of your capsules.

To combat this, try to use your remaining drugs to reduce your dosage over at least one week. You might need to take different doses on alternate days to reduce gradually. For example, if you are reducing from 1 tablet 3 times a day, you may need to take 2 tablets 1 day and 3 the next and so on.

Think of ways to store each day's dose safely so that you aren't tempted to take them early. Perhaps a responsible adult family member could look after them for you?

## Managing side effects

Try to find ways to keep busy, exercising, drinking plenty of non-alcoholic fluids and trying to eat regularly will all help. Try to set a regular sleep pattern, going to bed and waking at a regular time.

You can take paracetamol (no more than eight tablets a day) for headaches and pains. Loperamide (Imodium) can help ease diarrhoea. Both of these can be bought over the counter in pharmacies.

**If you feel seriously ill contact 111.**

**Take Note:** It is very unlikely that your GP or drug service will prescribe you pregabalin or gabapentin for withdrawal symptoms.

## STAY SAFE

Remember, pregabalin and gabapentin are prescribed medications that can slow down and stop your breathing if you take too many. This also happens if you take them with large amounts of alcohol and with drugs such as heroin, codeine, fentanyl, methadone, buprenorphine.

Taking pregabalin or gabapentin with alcohol can make you more likely to overdose.

Avoid the use of several different drugs at one time. If you are using any opiate drugs talk to us about 'take-home naloxone' – naloxone saves lives.

**Take Note:** It is important to keep all drugs and medicines in a safe place that children cannot access. A locked box kept high up out of reach is the safest place.



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