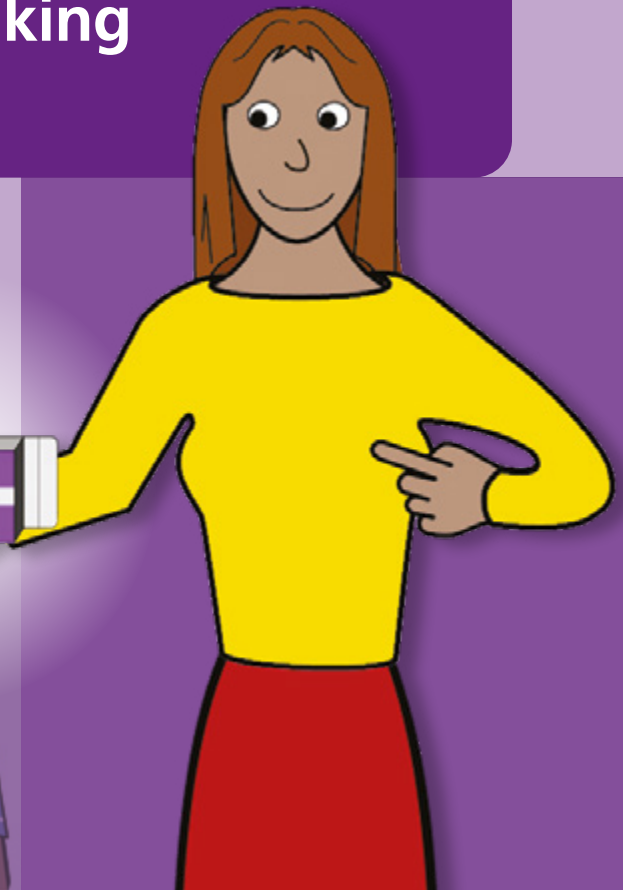
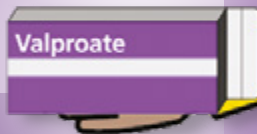




Information leaflet about medicine reviews for women and people taking valproate





What is this leaflet about?

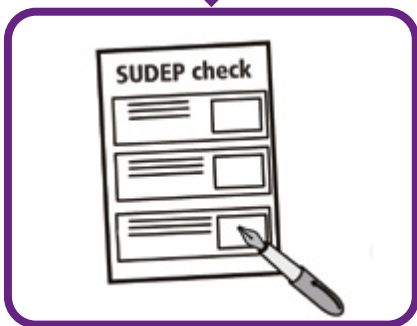
This leaflet is about the benefits and risks of taking valproate for anyone under 55. This is to support you talking to your specialist about starting or taking valproate. Valproate is sometimes called Epilim or Depakote. Valproate is pronounced val-pro-ate.



Valproate can be very effective in treating epilepsy (seizures or fits) or bipolar disorder and other health problems. It is the best medication to reduce fits or seizures that are generalised.



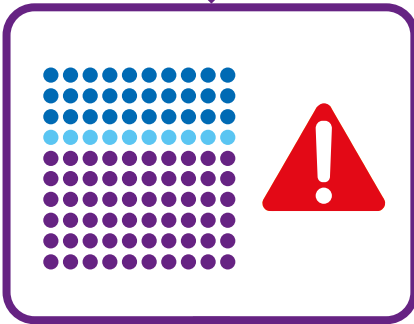
Your specialist will tell you about the best medication for you to live well and stay safe. Sometimes some people can be very ill with seizures or fits and some people can die suddenly (known as SUDEP, Sudden Unexpected Death in Epilepsy).



Your specialist will speak with you and your carers, family or advocate about the benefits and risks of your valproate medication. They will explain SUDEP and other risks to your health.



If you take valproate when you are pregnant it can cause health problems for your baby.



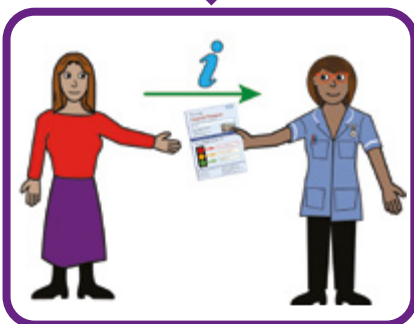
Valproate can affect the way a baby's body and brain grows. There can be a 30-40% chance of having a problem with how the baby's brain develops.

This might mean they have a learning disability or autism or cannot pay attention or sit still (ADHD).



Why do I need a review of my valproate medication?

If you take valproate it can cause health problems in babies. If you are under 55 you will be asked to meet with your specialist every year. This is known as a medication review.



If you have a healthcare passport, show it to your specialist. It will help them to support you.



Any decision about your medication must involve you. You can have someone with you at meetings with your specialist such as your family member, carer, friend, advocate or someone who can help you express your views.



Remember your voice is the most important. Always ask if you don't understand. Say if you don't feel you are included in decisions about your body and your life.



Your specialist will ask whether you are planning to have a baby or whether you don't think you will get pregnant. They will check whether valproate is still the best medication for you. You will be asked to complete an Annual Risk Acknowledgement Form (ARAF) with the specialist. You will be given a copy of the ARAF.



I don't think I will become pregnant

If you and the specialist don't think you will become pregnant, they will write this on the ARAF with the reason.

I may get pregnant

If you and your specialist think you might get pregnant, they will meet with you every year. You will discuss your epilepsy or bipolar disorder and check that valproate is still the best medication for you. They will check that you agree to take it.



If you are under 55 years old and could get pregnant, valproate can be used if two specialists agree this is the best medication for you. You will need to consider contraception like a coil or contraceptive implant. You can ask for counselling about your options.



If you could become pregnant, your specialist will discuss with you whether there is another medication that could be as good for you as valproate.



Changing from valproate to a medication that might not work as well, or changing it quickly, could make your seizures or health problems worse. Some people may have to go to hospital and some people may die.





I'm thinking about planning a pregnancy

If you're planning a pregnancy, it's very important to talk with your doctor. They can help you to do everything possible to reduce any risk to you or your baby before you become pregnant.



You need to let your doctor know very quickly if you do become pregnant. It's important not to stop taking your valproate medication without talking with your specialist as this is dangerous.



It's important if you get pregnant and have seizures or fits that these are stopped as much as possible. Too many seizures can affect the way the bodies and brains of babies grow. Sometimes women and unborn babies die because of seizures and SUDEP (Sudden Unexpected Death in Epilepsy).



Lots of women with epilepsy have good pregnancies but it can be an unsafe time. Some women become mothers without being pregnant such as adoption.



Further information

You can download a PDF of this leaflet and find out more at:

southeastclinicalnetworks.nhs.uk/valproate

You can also **scan this QR code** by pointing your phone camera at it.

This leaflet is also available to download in a variety of other languages.

Acknowledgement

Thank you to all the clinicians across the south east region and beyond, along with the experts by experience with both epilepsy and mental health conditions who have contributed to this leaflet.

We are particularly grateful for the input from Active Prospects, ProActive Community members, SUDEP Action, and My Life My Choice who have shaped the leaflet alongside us.

