



Antiepileptic Drugs (AED's)

Your physician had determined that a special class of medications may be helpful to your condition. An antiepileptic drug, or AED, is a medication used in the treatment of epilepsy, or seizures. In recent years, as medical information expands, these drugs are being found useful in the treatment of other disorders such as pain due to nerve injury (neuropathy, trigeminal neuralgia, shingles), back injuries, headaches, and in some conditions which causes spasms or spasticity. Physicians also use certain AED's in the treatment of mood disorders such as bipolar disorder or behavioral lability. Many of these conditions are considered "off-label" uses (i.e. the FDA has not yet approved the medication for this purpose). However, your doctors only prescribe AED's for off-label uses if they feel that the best medical evidence supports their use in your condition and that you stand a good chance of improvement.

As with any medication, there is the potential for side effects. Although each drug has its own side effect profile, most of these are mild and transient. However, occasionally severe reactions can occur (as with any medication). Tiredness and imbalance (feeling drunk) are common side effects and are usually transient (i.e. the longer you take the medications, the less pronounced the symptoms become). On occasion, a drug rash can occur. Usually this is not serious and resolves once the medication is stopped. Your doctor needs to know if a rash occurs (particularly if there is blistering of the mouth, eyes, or other mucous membranes) because rarely a serious skin reaction can occur which can be life-threatening. Other serious reactions include depression of white blood cell counts or bone marrow failure, or liver dysfunction/failure. These are rare side effects. Your doctor may occasionally want to check your blood work.

Depending upon the drug prescribed, weight gain/loss, sleep disruption, hair loss, concentration difficulty, tremor, double vision, or nausea can occur. Unforeseen reactions can occur. **If you are pregnant, or planning to become pregnant, your doctor must know.** All AED's have a small risk of fetal malformations and some have a risk of spinal bifida. Many of the effects of AED's in pregnancy are unknown. If you have to be on an AED and are pregnant you should be on at least 1 mg/day of folic acid. AED's can also decrease the effectiveness of birth control pills. Sometimes the first sign of failure of a pill is breakthrough bleeding (other times, pregnancy may be the first sign). You should take alternative precautions (condom with spermicide) if necessary.

If you are epileptic or suffer from recurrent seizures, you should be aware of driving restrictions (in South Carolina you must be seizure-free for 6 months before resumption of driving). The Epilepsy Foundation has an excellent web site www.epilepsyfoundation.org (1-800-EFA-1000). The American Epilepsy Society's website is www.aesnet.org.