

Sodium Valproate for Trigeminal Neuralgia

A guide for patients

What is Sodium Valproate?

Sodium valproate (brand name: Epilim) is a medication commonly used to treat epilepsy and mood disorders. It's also sometimes used to help manage nerve pain conditions like trigeminal neuralgia, especially when other medications haven't worked or aren't tolerated. While not a first-choice treatment, it can be effective in reducing facial pain caused by overactive nerve firing.

How It Works

Sodium valproate works by calming the electrical activity in the brain and nerves. It increases levels of a calming chemical called GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid), which helps to reduce excessive nerve firing and pain signals in trigeminal neuralgia.

Typical Dosing and Escalation

- Starting dose: Usually 200 mg once or twice daily.
- Tablet sizes: 100 mg immediate release, and 200 mg and 500 mg tablets controlled (or slow) release tablets
- Dose escalation: The dose is increased by 200 mg to 400mg every week to two weeks depending on how well it's tolerated and how effective it is.
- Target dose: 800 mg to 1000 mg divided into two doses.
- Maximum dose: Can go up to 2000 mg per day in divided doses, though this is rare in pain management.
- Your doctor may order blood tests to check how much medication is in your system, especially at higher doses, to avoid side effects and ensure effectiveness.

How Long Until It Works?

Some improvement may be noticed within a few days to a week, but it may take 2–4 weeks to reach full effect. It's important to take the medication regularly for best results.

Common Side Effects

Most side effects are mild and tend to improve with time or dose adjustment. They include:

- Drowsiness or grogginess
- Tremor (shaky hands)
- Weight gain
- Nausea or upset stomach
- Hair thinning or changes in hair texture
- Mood changes (rare)
- Less common but serious: liver problems, low blood platelets – your doctor may do regular blood tests to monitor this, especially early on.
- Like most of the medications used to treat trigeminal neuralgia, sodium valproate is teratogenic (Category D) and should be strictly avoided in pregnancy when possible.

Important Tips

- Take with food to reduce stomach upset.
- Let your doctor know if you have liver problems or a history of bleeding disorders.
- Don't stop suddenly—reduce slowly under medical supervision.

Final Word

Sodium valproate can be a helpful option for trigeminal neuralgia, especially when other treatments aren't suitable. Like all medications, it works best when taken regularly and monitored closely by your doctor. If you're experiencing side effects or not seeing improvement, adjustments can usually be made.

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