



## Using *Carbamazepine or Oxcarbazepine* in Children and Adolescents

This information explains how *Carbamazepine or Oxcarbazepine* can be used as part of a treatment plan with children and adolescents. You may wish to share this information with your family members to help them to understand your treatment options. Since every person's needs are different, it is important that you follow the advice provided to you by your own doctor, nurse and/or pharmacist and speak to them if you have any questions about this medication.

### What is Carbamazepine and Oxcarbazepine used for?



Carbamazepine (Tegretol®) and oxcarbazepine (Trileptal®) belong to a group of medications often used to treat seizure disorders. These medications are also “mood stabilizers”. and can be used to treat bipolar disorder. In some cases, these medications may be used to treat aggression and impulsivity.

Your doctor may be using one of these medications for another reason. If you are unclear why it is being prescribed, please ask your doctor.

### What is the difference between carbamazepine and oxcarbazepine?

Carbamazepine is converted to oxcarbazepine in the body. Basically, both these medications are similar. They both work equally well. Oxcarbazepine appears to have less of some of the serious side effects such as rash, blood changes and liver damage.

### How do Carbamazepine and Oxcarbazepine work?

These medications change the way your nerves send electronic signals. They have a “stabilizing” effect on certain chemicals in your body. If you are being treated for bipolar disorder, stabilizing these chemicals helps to reduce severe mood fluctuations and returns your activity level to normal. It helps you to have more control over your emotions and function better.

The exact way that carbamazepine and oxcarbazepine improves the symptoms of bipolar disorder is still not fully known.

### How should Carbamazepine and Oxcarbazepine be taken?

These medications are available as regular and chewable tablets (carbamazepine only) as well as a liquid. They are usually taken two or three times a day. Your doctor will set the dose based on how you respond to this medication. Usually, your doctor will start with a low dose and increase it slowly every 3-7 days. The doctor may ask you to have blood tests to measure how much carbamazepine is in your blood.

These medications should be taken at the same time each day as directed by your doctor. Try to connect taking it with something you do each day (like eating breakfast or brushing your teeth) so that you don't forget.

Do not take your carbamazepine just before getting a blood test – this affects your carbamazepine level results. Instead, take your carbamazepine dose right after the blood test is over.

### When will this medication start working?

When these medications are being used to control “mania” (excited mood), it takes about 2 weeks before you notice a decrease in symptoms like racing thoughts, improved sleep, and decreased irritability. You might notice an improvement earlier if this medication is combined with another one.

**Since these medications take time to work, do not increase, decrease or stop them without discussing it with your doctor.**

This medication does not work in everyone. If you find it has not helped you within a month or two, or the side effects are too bothersome, your doctor may recommend you try a different medication.

### **How long do I have to take this medication?**



This depends on the symptoms you have, how frequent they occur and how long you have had them. Most people who have bipolar disorder need to take this medication for at least 6 months. This allows time for your symptoms to stabilize and for you to regain functioning while decreasing the chance that you will have another mood episode. After this time, you and your doctor can

discuss the benefits and risks to continuing treatment.

If you have had several episodes of mania or depression and you tolerate this medication well, you may be asked to take this medication indefinitely. By continuing to take this medication, you significantly decrease the chance that you may have another episode of mania or depression!

Once you have started taking this medication, your doctor and you will need to monitor for both the beneficial and unwanted effects. Your doctor may order some blood tests and will likely check your progress and discuss changes in symptoms during the next 3 months to confirm that the medication is working properly and that possible side effects are avoided.

**Keep all appointments with your doctor and the laboratory. Your doctor may order certain lab tests (like liver function tests, complete blood counts and/or a carbamazepine level) to check how you/your child is responding.**

**Do not stop taking this medication if you are feeling better without first discussing it with your doctor.**

### **Are these medications addictive?**

No, they are not addictive. You will not have “cravings” for these medications like some people do with nicotine or street drugs. If you and your doctor decide it is best to stop, your doctor will explain how to safely come off this medication.

### **What are the side effects and what should I do if I get them?**

As with most medications, side effects may occur in those who take carbamazepine and oxcarbazepine. Most side effects are mild and temporary. Side effects may occur before any of the beneficial effects. It is possible to experience a side effect that you feel is serious or long lasting. If this occurs, speak to your doctor about ways to manage these side effects. Here are some common side effects of taking these medications. In brackets are suggested ways to lessen these effects.

#### **Common side effects**

Should any of these side effects be too troublesome for you, please discuss them with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

- Drowsiness (*try taking the dose at bedtime*)
- Dizziness (*try getting up slowly from a sitting or lying down position*)
- Headache (*try using a pain reliever like acetaminophen*)
- Double vision
- Clumsiness
- Clouded thinking
- Stomach ache, nausea (*try taking the medication with food*)
- Skin rash or itchy skin (*use special anti-itch moisturizers like aveeno*)

### **Uncommon side effects** (e.g., those that occur in less than 5% of patients)

Contact your doctor IMMEDIATELY if you have any of these side effects:

- Muscle weakness
- Nervousness
- Unusual bleeding or bruising (low white cells and platelets in the blood)
- Drop in sodium concentration in the body
- Double vision
- Swelling in the face or lower legs
- Numbness or tingling in the hands or feet.

Your doctor will be checking with you and doing some blood tests to see if you are having any of these side effects.

### **What precautions should my doctor and I be aware of when taking this medication?**

Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you:

- have any allergies or have had bad reactions to other medications.
- are (or start) taking any other prescription or non-prescription medications. Many medications interact with these medications (like birth control pills). Your doctor may need to change the doses of your medication(s) or monitor you carefully for side effects if you are taking other medications.
- have a history of diabetes, heart, kidney or liver disease.
- miss a period, become pregnant, are breast feeding or are trying to become pregnant. These medications should be avoided in pregnancy if possible.



**Tip:** You may be more sensitive to the sun than usual. When you start taking this medication, remember to use sun screen and sunglasses.

**Tip:** Carbamazepine and Oxcarbazepine can make some individuals feel drowsy, dizzy or slowed down. If you experience these temporary side effects, it is important to avoid operating heavy machinery or driving a car.



### **What special instructions should I follow while using Carbamazepine and Oxcarbazepine?**

- Do not allow anyone else to use your medication.
- Try to keep a healthy and well balanced diet.
- Long-term use of Carbamazepine and Oxcarbazepine can impair your liver and result in liver damage.

Early signs of liver damage include:

- Yellowish skin
- Rash
- Loss of appetite
- Vomiting
- Weakness

The doctor can do a blood test to check your liver function if you are having these symptoms.

## What should I do if I forget to take a dose?

If you miss a dose of this medication, take it as soon as possible. However, if it is almost time for your next dose (e.g., within 4 hours), do not take the missed dose or double your next dose. Instead, continue your regular dosing schedule.



## What storage conditions are needed for this medication?

- Keep this medication in the original container, stored at room temperature away from moisture and heat (e.g., not in the bathroom).
- Keep this medication out of reach from children.