

# Epilepsy medicines and pregnancy

This information sheet is for you, your partner, and whānau/family to help you understand the risks of epilepsy medicines and pregnancy. This information should be used as part of a discussion with a doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or midwife.

Epilepsy medicines are used to control seizures in people with epilepsy.

Some epilepsy medicines can be used to treat other conditions, such as bipolar disorder.

## Some epilepsy medicines are harmful to unborn children

Some epilepsy medicines may cause birth defects and may affect brain development in children when taken by people who are pregnant.

The risk depends on things, such as:

- the epilepsy medicine you are taking (see 'Know the possible risks for your medicine')
- the dose you are taking
- taking more than one epilepsy medicine.

Not all children born to pregnant people taking an epilepsy medicine will be affected.

In people who can father children, the use of sodium valproate (Epilim) in the 3 months prior to conception may affect brain development in the child.

## Know the possible risks for your medicine

Birth defects, brain development disorders and/or other health problems in newborns are possible with any pregnancy. Studies in people have shown that with some epilepsy medicines, the risks of these occurring in the child may be higher.

Table 1 (on page 2) summarises risks of different epilepsy medicines and pregnancy.

It is important that you and your partner are aware of these risks.

## Use effective contraception

Use effective contraception when taking epilepsy medicines. You may need two types of contraception depending on the epilepsy medicine you take. Some epilepsy medicines interact with some types of contraception. Talk to your doctor about the best contraception choices for your medicine.

Make an appointment with your doctor if you are having any problems with your contraception.

## Have a pregnancy plan

Talk to your doctor if you are thinking about starting a family.

Your doctor will help make a pregnancy plan on how to manage your epilepsy or other condition and keep you and your future child as safe as possible.

Untreated epilepsy can be harmful. You **must** talk to your doctor **before** making any changes to your medicines.

In people who are pregnant, uncontrolled seizures may affect both the pregnant person and unborn child.

If you become pregnant, talk to your doctor straight away.

**Turn page over for more information**

**Table 1: Summary of risks for different epilepsy medicines**

Medicine (original brand name) Brand names in New Zealand may change, speak with your health care professional if unsure	Risks when taken by pregnant people			Risks when taken by people who can father children*
	Birth defects <sup>a</sup>	Brain development disorders <sup>b</sup>	Other health problems in new-borns <sup>c</sup>	Brain development disorders <sup>b</sup>
Cannabidiol (Epidyolex)				
Carbamazepine (Tegretol)				
Clobazam (Frisum)				
Clonazepam (Rivotril)				
Ethosuximide (Zarontin)				
Lacosamide (Vimpat)				
Lamotrigine (Lamictal)				
Levetiracetam (Keppra)				
Oxcarbazepine (Trileptal)				
Phenobarbitone (Luminal)				
Phenytoin (Dilantin)				
Primidone (Mysoline)				
Sodium valproate (Epilim)				
Topiramate (Topamax)				
Vigabatrin (Sabril)				

\*within 3 months of conception. There is no data on this potential risk to children fathered more than 3 months after stopping sodium valproate.

Source: Relevant [medicine data sheet \(medsafe.govt.nz/Medicines/infoSearch.asp\)](https://medsafe.govt.nz/Medicines/infoSearch.asp) at the time of this leaflet production.

## Key:

- Studies in people have found an increased risk.
- There is not enough information about an increased risk from studies in people. Studies in animals have found risks.
- There is not enough information about an increased risk from studies in people. Studies in animals have limited information.
- Studies in people do not suggest an increased risk.

## Notes:

- <sup>a</sup> Examples include neural tube defects, cleft lip, cleft palate, limb defects or hearing impairment
- <sup>b</sup> Examples include autism spectrum disorder, poor language skills, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, learning difficulties
- <sup>c</sup> Examples include bleeding disorders, low birth weight, withdrawal syndrome

## Additional information on epilepsy medicines and pregnancy:

- Healthify (formerly Health Navigator) website: ([healthify.nz/health-a-z/e/epilepsy-and-pregnancy](https://healthify.nz/health-a-z/e/epilepsy-and-pregnancy))
- Epilepsy New Zealand website: ([epilepsy.org.nz/managing-epilepsy/women-and-epilepsy/pregnancy-planning](https://epilepsy.org.nz/managing-epilepsy/women-and-epilepsy/pregnancy-planning))

You can also search for the [consumer medicine information leaflet \(medsafe.govt.nz/Medicines/infoSearch.asp\)](https://medsafe.govt.nz/Medicines/infoSearch.asp) for your medicine on the [Medsafe website \(medsafe.govt.nz/index.asp\)](https://medsafe.govt.nz/index.asp).

**Speak with your healthcare professional to find out more information about your medicine and what this may mean for you.**