Valproic acid and derivatives

Your child needs to be given medicine called valproic acid (say: val-PROE-ik-AS-id) or a medicine derived from valproic acid such as divalproex (say: DYE-val-proe-ex). This information sheet explains what valproic acid and divalproex do and how to give them to your child. It also explains what side effects or problems your child may have when they take this medicine.

What is valproic acid?

Valproic acid and divalproex are used to control and prevent certain types of seizures. Divalproex is changed to valproic acid in the body. The information below applies to both medicines.

You may hear the medicine called by its brand name, Depakene or Epival.

How should I give my child valproic acid?

Follow these instructions when giving your child valproic acid and divalproex:

- Give your child this medicine regularly, exactly as your doctor or pharmacist tells you to. Avoid missing doses by giving the medicine at the same times each day. Talk to your child's doctor before you stop giving this medicine for any reason. Make sure you have enough medicine on hand for weekends, holidays, or vacations.
- Give your child this medicine with meals or snacks to reduce stomach upset.
- Give your child this medicine with the special spoon or syringe your pharmacist gave you, if your child is taking the liquid form of valproic acid. The liquid may be mixed with other liquids or added to food if your child does not like the taste.
- Give your child this medicine swallowed whole, not crushed or chewed, if your child is taking the tablet or capsule.

What should I do if my child misses a dose of valproic acid?

If your child misses a dose of this medicine:

- Give the missed dose as soon as you remember.
- If it is almost time for the next dose, do not give the missed dose.
- Give the next dose at the regular time.
- Give only one dose at a time.

What are the possible side effects of valproic acid?

Call your doctor if your child continues to have any of these signs or symptoms:

- upset stomach, throwing up
- loss of appetite
- skin rash
- hair loss
- trembling of hands and arms
- unusual weight gain or loss

Call your doctor immediately if your child develops:

- unusual bleeding or bruising
- double vision
- dark or bloody urine
- increase in seizures

- unusual tiredness or weakness
- severe stomach cramps

What other important information should I know about valproic acid?

This medicine may make your child dizzy, drowsy, or less alert than normal, especially at the beginning of therapy. Tell your child's teacher that he or she is taking this medicine.

Keep all appointments at the clinic or doctor's office and for blood tests, so that your child's response to this medicine can be checked.

Before your child has any kind of surgery, including dental surgery or emergency treatment, tell the doctor or dentist that your child is taking this medication.

Check with your doctor or pharmacist before giving your child any other medicine (prescribed or not prescribed). For example, many cold and allergy products may have increased side effects when taken with this medicine.

Keep this medicine at room temperature. Store this medicine away from direct sunlight, and away from damp places such as the bathroom.

Throw away any medicine you do not use.

Keep all medicines out of your child's sight and reach.

If your child takes too much of any medicine, call the Ontario Poison Centre at one of these numbers. These calls are free.

- Call 416-813-5900 if you live in Toronto.
- Call 1-800-268-9017 if you live somewhere else in Ontario.
- If you live outside of Ontario, call your local Poison Information Centre.

Disclaimer: The information in this Family Med-aid is accurate at the time of printing. It provides a summary of information about valproic acid and divalproex and does not contain all possible information about this medicine. Not all side effects are listed. If you have any questions or want more information about valproic acid and divalproex, speak to your healthcare provider.