

NAME OF THE MEDICINAL PRODUCT

Epilim Syrup/Sodium Valproate 200mg

QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE COMPOSITION

Each 5ml of syrup contains Sodium Valproate 200mg.



PHARMACEUTICAL FORM

Syrup

CLINICAL PARTICULARS

Therapeutic indications

Treatment of generalized or partial epilepsy, particularly with the following patterns of seizures:

- absence
- myoclonic
- tonic-clonic
- atonic
- mixed

As well as, for partial epilepsy:

- simple or complex seizures
- secondary generalized seizures
- specific syndromes (West, Lennox-Gastaut)

Treatment and prevention of mania associated with bipolar disorder.

Posology and method of administration

Epilim Syrup is for oral administration.

Daily dosage requirements vary according to age and body weight.

Epilim Syrup may be given twice daily. If it is necessary to dilute Epilim Syrup, the recommended diluent is Syrup BP, but syrup containing SO₂ as a preservative should not be used. The diluted product will have a 14-day shelf life.

In patients where adequate control has been achieved Epilim Chrono formulations are interchangeable with other conventional or prolonged release formulations on an equivalent daily dosage basis.

Dosage

Usual requirements are as follows:

Adults

Dosage should start at 600mg daily increasing by 200mg at three-day intervals until control is achieved. This is generally within the dosage range 1000mg to 2000mg per day, ie 20-30mg/kg/day body weight. Where adequate control is not achieved within this range the dose may be further increased to 2500mg per day.

Children over 20kg

Initial dosage should be 400mg/day (irrespective of weight) with spaced increases until control is achieved; this is usually within the range 20-30mg/kg body weight per day. Where adequate control is not achieved within this range the dose may be increased to 35mg/kg body weight per day.

Children under 20kg

20mg/kg of body weight per day; in severe cases this may be increased but only in patients in whom plasma valproic acid levels can be monitored. Above 40mg/kg/day, clinical chemistry and haematological parameters should be monitored.

Use in the elderly

Although the pharmacokinetics of Epilim are modified in the elderly, they have limited clinical significance and dosage should be determined by seizure control.

The volume of distribution is increased in the elderly and because of decreased binding to serum albumin, the proportion of free drug is increased. This will affect the clinical interpretation of plasma valproic acid levels.

In patients with renal insufficiency

It may be necessary to decrease the dosage. Dosage should be adjusted according to clinical monitoring since monitoring of plasma concentrations may be misleading (*see Pharmacokinetic Properties*).

In patients with hepatic insufficiency

Salicylates should not be used concomitantly with Epilim since they employ the same metabolic pathway (*see Special Warnings and Precautions for Use and Undesirable Effects*).

Liver dysfunction, including hepatic failure resulting in fatalities, has occurred in patients whose treatment included valproic acid (*see Contraindications and Special Warnings and Precautions for Use*).

Salicylates should not be used in children under 16 years (*see aspirin/salicylate product information on Reye's syndrome*). In addition in conjunction with Epilim, concomitant use in children under 3 years can increase the risk of liver toxicity (*see Special Warnings*).

Female children and women of childbearing potential

Valproate must be initiated and supervised by a specialist experienced in the management of epilepsy. Valproate should not be used in female children and women of childbearing potential unless other treatments are ineffective or not tolerated (*see Special Warnings and Precautions for Use and Fertility, Pregnancy and Lactation*). The benefit and risk should be carefully reconsidered at regular treatment reviews. Valproate should preferably be prescribed as monotherapy and at the lowest effective dose, if possible as a prolonged release formulation. The daily dose should be divided into at least two single doses.

Combined Therapy

When starting Epilim in patients already on other anti-convulsants, these should be tapered slowly: initiation of Epilim therapy should then be gradual, with target dose being reached after about 2 weeks. In certain cases it may be necessary to raise the dose by 5 to 10mg/kg/day when used in combination with anti-convulsants which induce liver enzyme activity, eg phenytoin, phenobarbital and carbamazepine. Once known enzyme inducers have been withdrawn it may be possible to maintain seizure control on a reduced dose of Epilim. When barbiturates are being administered concomitantly and particularly if sedation is observed (particularly in children) the dosage of barbiturate should be reduced.

NB: In children requiring doses higher than 40mg/kg/day clinical chemistry and haematological parameters should be monitored.

Optimum dosage is mainly determined by seizure control and routine measurement of plasma levels is unnecessary. However, a method for measurement of plasma levels is available and may be helpful where there is poor control or side effects are suspected (*see Pharmacokinetic Properties*).

In treatment and prevention of mania associated with bipolar disorders:

Adults

The recommended initial dose is 1000mg/day. The dose should be increased as rapidly as possible to achieve the lowest therapeutic dose, which produces the desired clinical effects.

The recommended maintenance dosage for treatment of bipolar disorder is between 1000mg and 2000mg daily. In exceptional cases, the dose may be increased to not more than 3000mg daily. Doses should be adjusted according to individual clinical response.

Prophylactic treatment should be established individually with the lowest effective dose.

Contraindications

Epilim is contraindicated in the following situations:

- In epilepsy

- valproate is contraindicated in pregnancy unless there is no suitable alternative treatment
- valproate is contraindicated in women of childbearing potential, unless the conditions of Pregnancy Prevention Programme are fulfilled (see Female children, Women of childbearing potential, pregnant women section).

- In bipolar disorder

- valproate is contraindicated in pregnancy.
- valproate is contraindicated in women of childbearing potential, unless the conditions of Pregnancy Prevention Programme are fulfilled (see Female children, Women of childbearing potential, pregnant women section).

- Active liver disease
- Personal or family history of severe hepatic dysfunction, especially drug related
- Patients with known urea cycle disorders
- Hypersensitivity to sodium valproate
- Porphyria
- Valproate is contraindicated in patients known to have mitochondrial disorders caused by mutations in the nuclear gene encoding the mitochondrial enzyme polymerase γ (POLG), e.g. Alpers-Huttenlocher Syndrome, and in children under two years of age who are suspected of having a POLG-related disorder (see *Special Warnings and Precautions for Use*).

Special warnings and precautions for use

Although there is no specific evidence of sudden recurrence of underlying symptoms following withdrawal of valproate, discontinuation should normally only be done under the supervision of a specialist in a gradual manner. This is due to the possibility of sudden alterations in plasma concentrations giving rise to a recurrence of symptoms. NICE has advised that generic switching of valproate preparations is not normally recommended due to the clinical implications of possible variations in plasma concentrations.

Special warnings

Liver dysfunction:

Conditions of occurrence:

Severe liver damage, including hepatic failure sometimes resulting in fatalities, has been very rarely reported. Experience in epilepsy has indicated that patients most at risk, especially in cases of multiple anti-convulsant therapy, are infants and in particular young children under the age of 3 years and those with severe seizure disorders, organic brain disease, and (or) congenital metabolic or degenerative disease associated with mental retardation.

After the age of 3 years, the incidence of occurrence is significantly reduced and progressively decreases with age.

The concomitant use of salicylates should be avoided in children under 3 years due to the risk of liver toxicity. Additionally, salicylates should not be used in children under 16 years (see *aspirin/salicylate product information on Reye's syndrome*).

Monotherapy is recommended in children under the age of 3 years when prescribing Epilim, but the potential benefit of Epilim should be weighed against the risk of liver damage or pancreatitis in such patients prior to initiation of therapy.

In most cases, such liver damage occurred during the first 6 months of therapy, the period of maximum risk being 2-12 weeks.

Suggestive signs:

Clinical symptoms are essential for early diagnosis. In particular the following conditions, which may precede jaundice, should be taken into consideration, especially in patients at risk (see above: 'Conditions of occurrence'):

- non specific symptoms, usually of sudden onset, such as asthenia, malaise, anorexia, lethargy, oedema and drowsiness, which are sometimes associated with repeated vomiting and abdominal pain.
- in patients with epilepsy, recurrence of seizures.

These are an indication for immediate withdrawal of the drug.

Patients (or their family for children) should be instructed to report immediately any such signs to a physician should they occur. Investigations including clinical examination and biological assessment of liver function should be undertaken immediately.

Detection:

Liver function should be measured before therapy and then periodically monitored during the first 6 months of therapy, especially in those who seem most at risk, and those with a prior history of liver disease.

Amongst usual investigations, tests which reflect protein synthesis, particularly prothrombin rate, are most relevant.

Confirmation of an abnormally low prothrombin rate, particularly in association with other biological abnormalities (significant decrease in fibrinogen and coagulation factors; increased bilirubin level and raised transaminases) requires cessation of Epilim therapy.

As a matter of precaution and in case they are taken concomitantly salicylates should also be discontinued since they employ the same metabolic pathway.

As with most anti-epileptic drugs, increased liver enzymes are common, particularly at the beginning of therapy; they are also transient.

More extensive biological investigations (including prothrombin rate) are recommended in these patients; a reduction in dosage may be considered when appropriate and tests should be repeated as necessary.

Pancreatitis: Pancreatitis, which may be severe and result in fatalities, has been very rarely reported. Patients experiencing nausea, vomiting or acute abdominal pain should have a prompt medical evaluation (including measurement of serum amylase). Young children are at particular risk; this risk decreases with increasing age. Severe seizures and severe neurological impairment with combination anti-convulsant therapy may be risk factors. Hepatic failure with pancreatitis increases the risk of fatal outcome. In case of pancreatitis, Epilim should be discontinued.

Female children//Women of childbearing potential/Pregnancy:

Pregnancy Prevention Programme

Valproate has a high teratogenic potential and children exposed *in utero* to valproate have a high risk for congenital malformations and neurodevelopmental disorders.

Epilim is contraindicated in the following situations:

- In pregnancy unless there is no suitable alternative treatment.
- In women of childbearing potential unless below conditions are fulfilled.

Conditions of Pregnancy Prevention Programme:

The prescriber must ensure that:

- Individual circumstances should be evaluated in each case. Involving the patient in the discussion to guarantee her engagement, discuss therapeutic options and ensure her understanding of the risks and the measures needed to minimise the risks.
- The potential for pregnancy is assessed for all female patients.
- The patient has understood and acknowledged the risks of congenital malformations and neurodevelopmental disorders including the magnitude of these risks for children exposed to valproate *in utero*.
- The patient understands the need to undergo pregnancy testing prior to initiation of treatment and during treatment, as needed.

- The patient is counselled regarding contraception, and that the patient is capable of complying with the need to use effective contraception (for further details please refer to subsection contraception of this boxed warning), without interruption during the entire duration of treatment with valproate.
- The patient understands the need for regular (at least annual) review of treatment by a specialist experienced in the management of epilepsy.
- The patient understands the need to consult her physician as soon as she is planning pregnancy to ensure timely discussion and switching to alternative treatment options prior to conception and before contraception is discontinued.
- The patient understands the need to urgently consult her physician in case of pregnancy.
- The patient has received the Patient Guide.
- The patient has acknowledged that she has understood the hazards and necessary precautions associated with valproate use (Annual Risk Acknowledgement Form).

These conditions also concern women who are not currently sexually active unless the prescriber considers that there are compelling reasons to indicate that there is no risk of pregnancy.

Female children

The prescriber must ensure that:

- The parents/caregivers of female children understand the need to contact the specialist once the female child using valproate experiences menarche.
- The parents/caregivers of female children who have experienced menarche are provided with comprehensive information about the risks of congenital malformations and neurodevelopmental disorders including the magnitude of these risks for children exposed to valproate *in utero*.

In patients who have experienced menarche, the prescribing specialist must annually reassess the need for valproate therapy and consider alternative treatment options. If valproate is the only suitable treatment, the need for using effective contraception and all other conditions of the pregnancy prevention programme should be discussed. Every effort should be made by the specialist to switch female children to alternative treatment before they reach adulthood.

Pregnancy test

Pregnancy must be excluded before start of treatment with valproate. Treatment with valproate must not be initiated in women of childbearing potential without a negative pregnancy test (plasma pregnancy test) result, confirmed by a healthcare provider, to rule out unintended use in pregnancy.

Contraception

Women of childbearing potential who are prescribed valproate must use effective contraception without interruption during the entire duration of treatment with valproate. These patients must be provided with comprehensive information on pregnancy prevention and should be referred for contraceptive advice if they are not using effective contraception. At least one effective method of contraception (preferably a user independent form such as an intra-uterine device or implant) or two complementary forms of contraception including a barrier method should be used. Individual circumstances should be evaluated in each case when choosing the contraception method, involving the patient in the discussion to guarantee her engagement and compliance with the chosen measures. Even if she has amenorrhoea she must follow all the advice on effective contraception.

Oestrogen-containing products

Concomitant use with oestrogen-containing products, including oestrogen-containing hormonal contraceptives, may potentially result in decreased valproate efficacy (see section 4.5). Prescribers should monitor clinical response (seizure control) when initiating, or discontinuing oestrogen-containing products.

On the opposite, valproate does not reduce efficacy of hormonal contraceptives.

Annual treatment reviews by a specialist

The specialist should review at least annually whether valproate is the most suitable treatment for the patient. The specialist should discuss the Annual Risk Acknowledgement Form at initiation and during each annual review, and ensure that the patient has understood its content.

Pregnancy planning

If a woman is planning to become pregnant, a specialist experienced in the management of epilepsy must reassess valproate therapy and consider alternative treatment options. Every effort should be made to switch to appropriate alternative treatment prior to conception and before contraception is discontinued (see section 4.6). If switching is not possible, the woman should receive further counselling regarding the risks of valproate for the unborn child to support her informed decision-making regarding family planning.

In case of pregnancy

If a woman using valproate becomes pregnant, she must be immediately referred to a specialist to re-evaluate treatment with valproate and consider alternative treatment options. The patients with valproate-exposed pregnancy and their partners should be referred to a specialist experienced in prenatal medicine for evaluation and counselling regarding the exposed pregnancy (see section 4.6).

Pharmacists must ensure that:

- The Patient Card is provided with every valproate dispensation and that patients understand its content.
- Patients are advised not to stop valproate medication and to immediately contact a specialist in case of planned or suspected pregnancy.

Educational materials

In order to assist healthcare professionals and patients in avoiding exposure to valproate during pregnancy, the Marketing Authorisation Holder has provided educational materials to reinforce the warnings, provide guidance regarding use of valproate in women of childbearing potential and provide details of the Pregnancy Prevention Programme. A Patient Guide and Patient Card should be provided to all women of childbearing potential using valproate.

An Annual Risk Acknowledgement Form needs to be used at time of treatment initiation and during each annual review of valproate treatment by the specialist.

Valproate therapy should only be continued after a reassessment of the benefits and risks of the treatment with valproate for the patient by a specialist experienced in the management of epilepsy.

Aggravated convulsions:

As with other anti-epileptic drugs, some patients may experience, instead of an improvement, a reversible worsening of convulsion frequency and severity (including status epilepticus), or the onset of new types of convulsions with valproate. In case of aggravated convulsions, the patients should be advised to consult their physician immediately

Suicidal ideation and behaviour:

Suicidal ideation and behaviour have been reported in patients treated with anti-epileptic agents in several indications. A meta-analysis of randomised placebo controlled trials of anti-epileptic drugs has also shown a small increased risk of suicidal ideation and behaviour. The mechanism of this risk is not known and the available data does not exclude the possibility of an increased risk for sodium valproate.

Therefore patients should be monitored for signs of suicidal ideation and behaviours and appropriate treatment should be considered.

Patients (and caregivers of patients) should be advised to seek medical advice should signs of suicidal ideation or behaviour emerge.

Carbapenem agents:

The concomitant use of valproate and carbapenem agents is not recommended.

Patients with known or suspected mitochondrial disease:

Valproate may trigger or worsen clinical signs of underlying mitochondrial diseases caused by mutations of mitochondrial DNA as well as the nuclear encoded POLG gene. In particular, valproate-induced acute liver failure and liver-related deaths have been reported at a higher rate in patients with hereditary neurometabolic syndromes caused by mutations in the gene for the mitochondrial enzyme polymerase γ (POLG), e.g. Alpers-Huttenlocher Syndrome.

POLG-related disorders should be suspected in patients with a family history or suggestive symptoms of a POLG-related disorder, including but not limited to unexplained encephalopathy, refractory epilepsy (focal, myoclonic), status epilepticus at presentation, developmental delays, psychomotor regression, axonal sensorimotor neuropathy, myopathy cerebellar ataxia, ophthalmoplegia, or complicated migraine with occipital aura. POLG mutation testing should be performed in accordance with current clinical practice for the diagnostic evaluation of such disorders (see *Contraindication*).

Precautions

Haematological:

Blood tests (blood cell count, including platelet count, bleeding time and coagulation tests) are recommended prior to initiation of therapy or before surgery, and in case of spontaneous bruising or bleeding (see *Undesirable Effects*).

Renal insufficiency:

In patients with renal insufficiency, it may be necessary to decrease dosage. As monitoring of plasma concentrations may be misleading, dosage should be adjusted according to clinical monitoring (see *Posology and Method of Administration and Pharmacokinetic Properties*).

Systemic lupus erythematosus:

Although immune disorders have only rarely been noted during the use of Epilim, the potential benefit of Epilim should be weighed against its potential risk in patients with systemic lupus erythematosus (see *Undesirable Effects*).

Hyperammonaemia:

When a urea cycle enzymatic deficiency is suspected, metabolic investigations should be performed prior to treatment because of the risk of hyperammonaemia with Epilim.

Weight gain:

Epilim very commonly causes weight gain, which may be marked and progressive. Patients should be warned of the risk of weight gain at the initiation of therapy and appropriate strategies should be adopted to minimise it (see *Undesirable Effects*).

Diabetic patients:

Epilim is eliminated mainly through the kidneys, partly in the form of ketone bodies; this may give false positives in the urine testing of possible diabetics.

In addition, care should be taken when treating diabetic patients with Epilim Syrup since it contains 3.6g sucrose per 5ml.

Carnitine palmitoyltransferase (CPT) type II deficiency:

Patients with an underlying carnitine palmitoyltransferase (CPT) type II deficiency should be warned of the greater risk of rhabdomyolysis when taking Epilim

Alcohol:

Alcohol intake is not recommended during treatment with valproate.

Interaction with other medicinal products and other forms of interaction

Effects of Epilim on other drugs

- ***Antipsychotics, MAO inhibitors, antidepressants and benzodiazepines***
Epilim may potentiate the effect of other psychotropics such as antipsychotics, MAO inhibitors, antidepressants and benzodiazepines; therefore, clinical monitoring is advised and the dosage of the other psychotropics should be adjusted when appropriate.
In particular, a clinical study has suggested that adding olanzapine to valproate or lithium therapy may significantly increase the risk of certain adverse events associated with olanzapine e.g. neutropenia, tremor, dry mouth, increased appetite and weight gain, speech disorder and somnolence.
- ***Lithium***
Epilim has no effect on serum lithium levels.
- ***Olanzapine***
Valproic acid may decrease the olanzapine plasma concentration.
- ***Phenobarbital***
Epilim increases phenobarbital plasma concentrations (due to inhibition of hepatic catabolism) and sedation may occur, particularly in children. Therefore, clinical monitoring is recommended throughout the first 15 days of combined treatment with immediate reduction

of phenobarbital doses if sedation occurs and determination of phenobarbital plasma levels when appropriate.

- **Primidone**
Epilim increases primidone plasma levels with exacerbation of its adverse effects (such as sedation); these signs cease with long term treatment. Clinical monitoring is recommended especially at the beginning of combined therapy with dosage adjustment when appropriate.
- **Phenytoin**
Epilim decreases phenytoin total plasma concentration. Moreover Epilim increases phenytoin free form with possible overdose symptoms (valproic acid displaces phenytoin from its plasma protein binding sites and reduces its hepatic catabolism). Therefore clinical monitoring is recommended; when phenytoin plasma levels are determined, the free form should be evaluated.
- **Carbamazepine**
Clinical toxicity has been reported when Epilim was administered with carbamazepine as Epilim may potentiate toxic effects of carbamazepine. Clinical monitoring is recommended especially at the beginning of combined therapy with dosage adjustment when appropriate.
- **Lamotrigine**
Epilim reduces the metabolism of lamotrigine and increases the lamotrigine mean half-life by nearly two fold. This interaction may lead to increased lamotrigine toxicity, in particular serious skin rashes. Therefore clinical monitoring is recommended and dosages should be adjusted (lamotrigine dosage decreased) when appropriate.
- **Felbamate**
Valproic acid may decrease the felbamate mean clearance by up to 16%.
- **Rufinamide**
Valproic acid may lead to an increase in plasma levels of rufinamide. This increase is dependent on concentration of valproic acid. Caution should be exercised, in particular in children, as this effect is larger in this population.
- **Propofol**
Valproic acid may lead to an increased blood level of propofol. When co-administered with valproate, a reduction of the dose of propofol should be considered.
- **Zidovudine**
Epilim may raise zidovudine plasma concentration leading to increased zidovudine toxicity.
- **Nimodipine**
In patients concomitantly treated with sodium valproate and nimodipine the exposure to nimodipine can be increased by 50%. The nimodipine dose should therefore be decreased in case of hypotension.
- **Temozolomide**
Co-administration of temozolomide and Epilim may cause a small decrease in the clearance of temozolomide that is not thought to be clinically relevant.

Effects of other drugs on Epilim

- **Anti-epileptics**
Anti-epileptics with enzyme inducing effect (including phenytoin, phenobarbital, carbamazepine) decrease valproic acid plasma concentrations. Dosages should be adjusted according to clinical response and blood levels in case of combined therapy.

Valproic acid metabolite levels may be increased in the case of concomitant use with phenytoin or phenobarbital. Therefore, patients treated with those two drugs should be carefully monitored for signs and symptoms of hyperammonaemia.

On the other hand, combination of felbamate and Epilim decreases valproic acid clearance by 22% to 50% and consequently increase the valproic acid plasma concentration. Epilim dosage should be monitored.

- **Anti-malarial agents**
Mefloquine and chloroquine increase valproic acid metabolism and may lower the seizure threshold; therefore epileptic seizures may occur in cases of combined therapy. Accordingly, the dosage of Epilim may need adjustment.
- **Highly protein bound agents**
In case of concomitant use of Epilim and highly protein bound agents (e.g. aspirin), free valproic acid plasma levels may be increased.
- **Vitamin K-dependent factor anticoagulants**
The anticoagulant effect of warfarin and other coumarin anticoagulants may be increased following displacement from plasma protein binding sites by valproic acid. The prothrombin time should be closely monitored.
- **Cimetidine or erythromycin**
Valproic acid plasma levels may be increased (as a result of reduced hepatic metabolism) in case of concomitant use with cimetidine or erythromycin.
- **Carbapenem antibiotics** such as **panipenem, imipenem** and **meropenem**
Decreases in blood levels of valproic acid have been reported when it is co-administered with carbapenem agents resulting in a 60%-100% decrease in valproic acid levels within two days, sometimes associated with convulsions. Due to the rapid onset and the extent of the decrease, co-administration of carbapenem agents in patients stabilised on valproic acid should be avoided (see *Special Warnings and Precautions For Use*). If treatment with these antibiotics cannot be avoided, close monitoring of valproic acid blood levels should be performed.
- **Rifampicin**
Rifampicin may decrease the valproic acid blood levels resulting in a lack of therapeutic effect. Therefore, valproate dosage adjustment may be necessary when it is co-administered with rifampicin.
- **Protease inhibitors**
Protease inhibitors such as lopinavir and ritonavir decrease valproate plasma level when co-administered.
- **Cholestyramine**
Cholestyramine may lead to decrease in plasma level of valproate when co-administered.
- **Oestrogen-containing products, including oestrogen-containing hormonal contraceptives**
Oestrogens are inducers of the UDP-glucuronosyl transferase (UGT) isoforms involved in valproate glucuronidation and may increase the clearance of valproate, which would result in decreased serum concentration of valproate and potentially decreased valproate efficacy. Consider monitoring of valproate serum levels.

On the opposite, valproate has no enzyme inducing effect; as a consequence, valproate does not reduce efficacy of oestroprogestative agents in women receiving hormonal contraception.

Other Interactions

Caution is advised when using Epilim in combination with newer anti-epileptics whose pharmacodynamics may not be well established.

Concomitant administration of valproate and topiramate or acetazolamide has been associated with encephalopathy and/or hyperammonaemia. In patients taking these two drugs, careful monitoring of signs and symptoms is advised in particularly at risk patients such as those with pre-existing encephalopathy.

- **Quetiapine**

Co-administration of Epilim and quetiapine may increase the risk of neutropenia/leucopenia

Epilim usually has no enzyme-inducing effect; as a consequence, Epilim does not reduce efficacy of oestroprogestative agents in women receiving hormonal contraception, including the oral contraceptive pill.

Fertility, pregnancy and lactation

- Valproate is contraindicated as treatment for epilepsy during pregnancy unless there is no suitable alternative to treat epilepsy.
- Valproate is contraindicated as treatment for bipolar disorder during pregnancy
- Valproate is contraindicated for use in women of childbearing potential unless the above mentioned conditions of Pregnancy Prevention Programme are fulfilled (see Female children, Women of childbearing potential, pregnant women section).

Teratogenicity and developmental effects

Pregnancy Exposure Risk related to valproate

Both valproate monotherapy and valproate polytherapy including other anti-epileptics are frequently associated with abnormal pregnancy outcomes. Available data suggest that anti-epileptic polytherapy including valproate may be associated with a greater risk of congenital malformations than valproate monotherapy.

Valproate was shown to cross the placental barrier both in animal species and in humans (see section Pharmacokinetic properties).

In animals: teratogenic effects have been demonstrated in mice, rats and rabbits (see Preclinical safety data).

Congenital malformations

Data derived from a meta-analysis (including registries and cohort studies) has shown that 10.73% of children of epileptic women exposed to valproate monotherapy during pregnancy suffer from congenital malformations (95% CI: 8.16 -13.29). This is a greater risk of major malformations than for the general population, for whom the risk is about 2-3%. The risk is dose dependent but a threshold dose below which no risk exists cannot be established.

Available data show an increased incidence of minor and major malformations. The most common types of malformations include neural tube defects, facial dysmorphism, cleft lip and palate, craniostenosis, cardiac, renal and urogenital defects, limb defects (including bilateral aplasia of the radius), and multiple anomalies involving various body systems.

In utero exposure to valproate may also result in hearing impairment or deafness due to ear and/or nose malformations (secondary effect) and/or to direct toxicity on the hearing function. Cases describe both unilateral and bilateral deafness or hearing impairment. Outcomes were not reported for all cases. When outcomes were reported, the majority of the cases did not recover.

Developmental disorders

Data have shown that exposure to valproate in utero can have adverse effects on mental and physical development of the exposed children. The risk seems to be dose-dependent but a threshold dose below which no risk exists, cannot be established based on available data. The exact gestational period of risk for these effects is uncertain and the possibility of a risk throughout the entire pregnancy cannot be excluded.

Studies in preschool children exposed in utero to valproate show that up to 30-40% experience delays in their early development such as talking and walking later, lower intellectual abilities, poor language skills (speaking and understanding) and memory problems.

Intelligence quotient (IQ) measured in school aged children (age 6) with a history of valproate exposure in utero was on average 7-10 points lower than those children exposed to other anti-epileptics. Although the role of confounding factors cannot be excluded, there is evidence in children exposed to valproate that the risk of intellectual impairment may be independent from maternal IQ.

There are limited data on the long term outcomes.

Available data from a population-based study show that children exposed to valproate in utero are at increased risk of autistic spectrum disorder (approximately 3-fold) and childhood autism (approximately 5-fold) compared to the unexposed population in the study.

Available data from another population-based study show that children exposed to valproate in utero are at increased risk of developing attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (approximately 1.5-fold) compared to the unexposed population in the study.

Female children and woman of childbearing potential (see above and Special Warnings and Precautions for Use)

Oestrogen-containing products

Oestrogen-containing products, including oestrogen-containing hormonal contraceptives, may increase the clearance of valproate, which would result in decreased serum concentration of valproate and potentially decreased valproate efficacy.

If a Woman plans a Pregnancy

If a woman is planning to become pregnant, a specialist experienced in the management of epilepsy must reassess valproate therapy and consider alternative treatment options. Every effort should be made to switch to appropriate alternative treatment prior to conception and before contraception is discontinued. If switching is not possible, the woman should receive further counselling regarding the risks of valproate for the unborn child to support her informed decision-making regarding family planning.

Pregnant women

Valproate as treatment for epilepsy is contraindicated in pregnancy unless there is no suitable alternative treatment. If a woman using valproate becomes pregnant, she must be immediately referred to a specialist to consider alternative treatment options.

During pregnancy, maternal tonic clonic seizures and status epilepticus with hypoxia may carry a particular risk of death for the mother and the unborn child. If in exceptional circumstances, despite the known risks of valproate in pregnancy and after careful consideration of alternative treatment, a pregnant woman must receive valproate for epilepsy.

it is recommended to:

- Use the lowest effective dose and divide the daily dose valproate into several small doses to be taken throughout the day.
- The use of a prolonged release formulation may be preferable to other treatment formulations in order to avoid high peak plasma concentrations.

All patients with valproate-exposed pregnancy and their partners should be referred to a specialist experienced in prenatal medicine for evaluation and counselling regarding the exposed pregnancy. Specialised prenatal monitoring should take place to detect the possible occurrence of neural tube defects or other malformations. Folate supplementation before the pregnancy may decrease the risk of neural tube defects common to all pregnancies. However the available evidence does not suggest it prevents the birth defects or malformations due to valproate exposure.

Risk in the neonate

- Cases of haemorrhagic syndrome have been reported very rarely in neonates whose mothers have taken valproate during pregnancy. This haemorrhagic syndrome is related to thrombocytopenia, hypofibrinogenemia and/or to a decrease in other coagulation factors. Afibrinogenemia has also been reported and may be fatal. However, this syndrome must be distinguished from the decrease of the vitamin-K factors induced by phenobarbital and enzymatic inducers. Therefore, platelet count, fibrinogen plasma level, coagulation tests and coagulation factors should be investigated in neonates.
- Cases of hypoglycaemia have been reported in neonates whose mothers have taken valproate during the third trimester of their pregnancy.
- Cases of hypothyroidism have been reported in neonates whose mothers have taken valproate during pregnancy.
- Withdrawal syndrome (such as, in particular, agitation, irritability, hyper-excitability, jitteriness, hyperkinesia, tonic disorders, tremor, convulsions and feeding disorders) may occur in neonates whose mothers have taken valproate during the last trimester of their pregnancy.

Breast-feeding

Valproate is excreted in human milk with a concentration ranging from 1% to 10% of maternal serum levels. Haematological disorders have been shown in breastfed newborns/infants of treated women (see section *Undesirable effects*).

A decision must be made whether to discontinue breast-feeding or to discontinue/abstain from Epilim therapy taking into account the benefit of breast feeding for the child and the benefit of therapy for the woman.

Fertility

Amenorrhoea, polycystic ovaries and increased testosterone levels have been reported in women using valproate (see *Undesirable effects*). Valproate administration may also impair fertility in men (see *Undesirable effects*). Case reports indicate that fertility dysfunctions are reversible after treatment discontinuation.

Effects on ability to drive and use machines

Use of Epilim may provide seizure control such that the patient may be eligible to hold a driving licence.

Patients should be warned of the risk of transient drowsiness, especially in cases of anti-convulsant polytherapy or association with benzodiazepines (see *Interactions with Other Medicinal Products and Other Forms of Interaction*).

Undesirable effects

The following CIOMS frequency rating is used, when applicable:

Very common ($\geq 1/10$); Common ($\geq 1/100$ to $< 1/10$); Uncommon ($\geq 1/1,000$ to $< 1/100$); Rare ($\geq 1/10,000$ to $< 1/1,000$); Very rare ($< 1/10,000$), not known (cannot be estimated from available data).

Congenital malformations and developmental disorders (see *Special Warnings and Precautions for Use and Fertility, pregnancy and Lactation*).

Hepato-biliary disorders:

Common: liver injury (see *Special Warnings*)

Severe liver damage, including hepatic failure sometimes resulting in death, has been reported (see *Posology and method of administration, Contraindications and Special warnings*). Increased liver enzymes are common, particularly early in treatment, and may be transient (see *Special Warnings*).

Gastrointestinal disorders:

Very common: nausea

Common: vomiting, gingival disorder (mainly gingival hyperplasia), stomatitis, gastralgia, diarrhoea

The above three adverse events frequently occur at the start of treatment, but they usually disappear after a few days without discontinuing treatment. These problems can usually be overcome by taking Epilim with or after food or by using Enteric Coated Epilim.

Uncommon: pancreatitis, sometimes lethal (see *Special Warnings and Precautions for Use*).

Nervous system disorders:

Very common: tremor

Common: extrapyramidal disorder, stupor*, somnolence, convulsion*, memory impairment, headache, nystagmus,

Uncommon: coma*, encephalopathy, lethargy* (see below), reversible parkinsonism, ataxia, paraesthesia, aggravated convulsions.

Rare: reversible dementia associated with reversible cerebral atrophy, cognitive disorder.

Sedation has been reported occasionally, usually when in combination with other anti-convulsants. In monotherapy it occurred early in treatment on rare occasions and is usually transient.

*Rare cases of lethargy occasionally progressing to stupor, sometimes with associated hallucinations or convulsions have been reported. Encephalopathy and coma have very rarely been observed. These cases have often been associated with too high a starting dose or too rapid a dose escalation or concomitant use of other anti-convulsants, notably phenobarbital or topiramate. They have usually been reversible on withdrawal of treatment or reduction of dosage.

An increase in alertness may occur; this is generally beneficial but occasionally aggression, hyperactivity and behavioural deterioration have been reported.

Psychiatric disorders:

Common: confusional state, hallucinations, aggression*, agitation*, disturbance in attention*

Rare: abnormal behaviour*, psychomotor hyperactivity*, learning disorder*

*These ADRs are principally observed in the paediatric population.

Metabolism and nutrition disorders:

Common: hyponatraemia, weight increased*

*Weight increase should be carefully monitored since it is a factor for polycystic ovary syndrome (see section warning and precaution).

Rare: hyperammonaemia* (see section Precaution), obesity

*Cases of isolated and moderate hyperammonaemia without change in liver function tests may occur, are usually transient and should not cause treatment discontinuation. However, they may present clinically as vomiting, ataxia, and increasing clouding of consciousness. Should these symptoms occur Epilim should be discontinued.

Hyperammonaemia associated with neurological symptoms has also been reported (see *Precautions*). In such cases further investigations should be considered.

Endocrine Disorders:

Uncommon: Syndrome of Inappropriate Secretion of ADH (SIADH), hyperandrogenism (hirsutism, virilism, acne, male pattern alopecia, and/or androgen increase)

Rare: hypothyroidism (see *Fertility, pregnancy and lactation*)

Blood and lymphatic system disorders:

Common: anaemia, thrombocytopenia, (see *Precautions*).

Uncommon: pancytopenia, leucopenia

Rare: bone marrow failure, including pure red cell aplasia, agranulocytosis, anaemia macrocytic, macrocytosis

The blood picture returned to normal when the drug was discontinued.

Isolated findings of a reduction in blood fibrinogen and/or an increase in prothrombin time have been reported, usually without associated clinical signs and particularly with high doses (Epilim has an inhibitory effect on the second phase of platelet aggregation). Spontaneous bruising or bleeding is an indication for withdrawal of medication pending investigations (see also *Fertility, Pregnancy and Lactation*).

Skin and subcutaneous tissue disorders:

Common: hypersensitivity, transient and or dose related alopecia (hair loss), nail and nail bed disorders. Regrowth normally begins within six months, although the hair may become more curly than previously.

Uncommon: angioedema, rash; hair disorder (such as abnormal hair texture, hair colour changes, abnormal hair growth)

Hirsutism and acne have been very rarely reported.

Rare: toxic epidermal necrolysis, Stevens-Johnson syndrome, erythema multiforme, Drug Rash with Eosinophilia and Systemic Symptoms (DRESS) syndrome.

Reproductive system and breast disorders:

Common: dysmenorrhea

Uncommon: amenorrhea

Rare: male infertility, polycystic ovaries

Very rarely gynaecomastia has occurred.

Vascular disorders:

Common: haemorrhage (see *Precautions; Fertility, pregnancy and lactation*).

Uncommon: vasculitis

Eye disorders:

Rare: diplopia

Ear and labyrinth disorders:

Common: Deafness, a cause and effect relationship has not been established.

Renal and urinary disorders:

Common: urinary incontinence.

Uncommon: renal failure.

Rare: enuresis, tubulointerstitial nephritis, reversible Fanconi syndrome (a defect in proximal renal tubular function giving rise to glycosuria, amino aciduria, phosphaturia, and uricosuria) associated with Epilim therapy, but the mode of action is as yet unclear.

General disorders and administration site conditions:

Uncommon: hypothermia, non-severe peripheral oedema.

Musculoskeletal and connective tissue disorders:

Uncommon: bone mineral density decreased, osteopenia, osteoporosis and fractures in patients on long-term therapy with Epilim. The mechanism by which Epilim affects bone metabolism has not been identified.

Rare: systemic lupus erythematosus, rhabdomyolysis (see *Precautions*)

Respiratory, thoracic and mediastinal disorders:

Uncommon: pleural effusion

Investigations:

Rare: Coagulation factors decreased (at least one), abnormal coagulation tests (such as prothrombin time prolonged, activated partial thromboplastin time prolonged, thrombin time prolonged, INR prolonged).

Neoplasms benign, malignant and unspecified (including cysts and polyps):

Rare: myelodysplastic syndrome

Overdose

Cases of accidental and deliberate Epilim overdose have been reported. At plasma concentrations of up to 5 to 6 times the maximum therapeutic levels, there are unlikely to be any symptoms other than nausea, vomiting and dizziness.

Signs of acute massive overdose, i.e. plasma concentration 10 to 20 times maximum therapeutic levels, usually include CNS depression or coma with muscular hypotonia, hyporeflexia, miosis, impaired respiratory function, metabolic acidosis, hypotension and circulatory collapse/shock

A favourable outcome is usual, however some deaths have occurred following massive overdose.

Symptoms may however be variable and seizures have been reported in the presence of very high plasma levels (see *Pharmacokinetic Properties*).

Cases of intracranial hypertension related to cerebral oedema have been reported.

The presence of sodium content in the Epilim formulations may lead to hypernatraemia when taken in overdose.

Hospital management of overdose should be symptomatic, including cardio-respiratory monitoring. Gastric lavage may be useful up to 10 to 12 hours following ingestion.

Haemodialysis and haemoperfusion have been used successfully.

Naloxone has been successfully used in a few isolated cases, sometimes in association with activated charcoal given orally. In case of massive overdose, haemodialysis and haemoperfusion have been used successfully.

PHARMACOLOGICAL PROPERTIES

Pharmacodynamic properties

Sodium valproate is an anti-convulsant.

The most likely mode of action for Epilim is potentiation of the inhibitory action of gamma aminobutyric acid (GABA) through an action on the further synthesis or further metabolism of GABA.

In certain *in-vitro* studies it was reported that Epilim could stimulate HIV replication but studies on peripheral blood mononuclear cells from HIV infected subjects show that Epilim does not have a mitogen-like effect on inducing HIV replication. Indeed the effect of Epilim on HIV replication *ex-vivo* is highly variable, modest in quantity, appears to be unrelated to the dose and has not been documented in man.

Pharmacokinetic properties

The reported effective therapeutic range for plasma valproic acid levels is 40- 100mg/L (278-694µmol/L). This reported range may depend on time of sampling and presence of co-medication.

Distribution

The percentage of free (unbound) drug is usually between 6-15% of the total plasma levels. An increased incidence of adverse effects may occur with plasma levels above the effective therapeutic range.

The pharmacological (or therapeutic) effects of Epilim may not be clearly correlated with the total or free (unbound) plasma valproic acid levels.

Placental transfer (see section Fertility, pregnancy and lactation)

Valproate crosses the placental barrier in animal species and in humans:

- In animal species, valproate crosses the placenta to a similar extent as in humans.
- In humans, several publications assessed the concentration of valproate in the umbilical cord of neonates at delivery. Valproate serum concentration in the umbilical cord, representing that in the fetuses, was similar to or slightly higher than that in the mothers.

Metabolism

The major pathway of valproate biotransformation is glucuronidation (~ 40%), mainly via UGT1A6, UGT1A9 and UGT2B7.

Elimination

The half-life of Epilim is usually reported to be within the range 8 – 20 hours. It is usually shorter in children.

In patients with severe renal insufficiency it may be necessary to alter dosage in accordance with free plasma valproic acid levels.

Interaction with oestrogen-containing products

Inter-individual variability has been noted. There are insufficient data to establish a robust PK-PD relationship resulting from this PK interaction.

Preclinical safety data

Valproate was neither mutagenic in bacteria, nor in the mouse lymphoma assay *in vitro* and did not induce DNA repair in primary rat hepatocyte cultures. *In vivo*, however, contradictory results were obtained at teratogenic doses depending on the route of administration. After oral administration, the predominant route of administration in humans, valproate did not induce chromosome aberrations in rat bone marrow or dominant lethal effects in mice. Intraperitoneal injection of valproate increased DNA strand-breaks and chromosomal damage in rodents. In addition, increased sister-chromatid exchanges in epileptic patients exposed to valproate as compared to untreated healthy subjects have been reported in published studies. However, conflicting results were obtained when comparing data in epileptic patients treated with valproate with those in untreated epileptic patients. The clinical relevance of these DNA/chromosome findings is unknown.

Non-clinical data reveal no special hazard for humans based on conventional carcinogenicity studies.

Reproductive and developmental toxicity

Valproate induced teratogenic effects (malformations of multiple organ systems) in mice, rats and rabbits.

Animal studies show that *in utero* exposure to valproate results in morphological and functional alterations of the auditory system in rats and mice.

Behavioural abnormalities have been reported in first generation offspring of mice and rats after *in utero* exposure. Some behavioural changes have also been observed in the second generation and those were less pronounced in the third generation of mice following acute *in utero* exposure of the first generation to teratogenic valproate doses. The underlying mechanisms and the clinical relevance of these findings are unknown.

PHARMACEUTICAL PARTICULARS

Incompatibilities

None.

Shelf life

36 months.

Special precautions for storage

Store below 25°C.

Nature and contents of container

Amber glass bottles with polypropylene J-cap, polypropylene child-proof cap or aluminium tamper evident cap with expanded polyethylene seal and amber polyethylene tetraphthalate bottles with polypropylene tamper evident closure. Bottle size 200ml and 300ml. Not all pack sizes are marketed.

Presentation

Epilim Syrup 200mg/5ml

A red, cherry flavoured syrup.

Manufactured by:

UNITHER LIQUID MANUFACTURING

1-3, allée de la Neste, ZI d'en Sigal

31770 Colomiers – France

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