

## Appendix 4b: Patient information leaflet – Reducing your gabapentin or pregabalin for safety reasons

This leaflet explains why your healthcare worker is reducing or stopping gabapentin or pregabalin, what will happen during this process, and how you will be supported. It is for people who have been taking one of these medicines for long-lasting (chronic) pain.

### Why is my medicine being reduced?

Your healthcare worker reviews your medicine regularly to make sure that it is safe and helpful.

Research shows that gabapentin and pregabalin only help a small number of people with long-lasting pain.

These medicines are not usually recommended for conditions such as fibromyalgia (long-lasting pain in many parts of the body); lower back pain with or without sciatica (pain that travels from the lower back down the leg). This is because they are unlikely to give enough benefit and may cause unwanted effects (side effects).

Your healthcare worker has carefully considered your situation and believes that continuing this medicine is not the safest option for you.

### What are the risks of long-term use?

Taking gabapentin or pregabalin for a long time can increase the risk of:

- breathing difficulties (such as breathing becoming slow or feeling unable to get enough air)
- problems with memory or concentration
- becoming physically dependent on the medicine.

The risks are higher if you also take other medicines that can make you drowsy, such as strong painkillers, sleeping tablets or anxiety medicines.

Some people are more vulnerable because of their age, other health conditions, kidney problems, or other medicines they take.

Your healthcare worker has considered these risks when recommending that this medicine is reduced.

### What are the benefits of reducing gabapentin or pregabalin?

Reducing or stopping this medicine can reduce the risk of harm. Some people notice improved alertness, memory or concentration. Others find that their overall function, energy or quality of life improves as side effects reduce.

**What will happen next?**

Your healthcare worker will arrange a slow and carefully planned reduction in your dose.

Before any changes are made, you will be given clear information about what dose changes are planned and when they will happen, and you will have a chance to ask questions.

During the process your healthcare worker will monitor your symptoms, pain levels and general wellbeing.

**Why do I need to attend appointments and stay in contact?**

You need to attend your appointments so your healthcare worker can check how you are getting on and reduce your dose safely.

If you are unable to attend an appointment, please let your healthcare team know so another arrangement can be made.

**What symptoms might I notice while the medicine is being reduced?**

Some people notice withdrawal symptoms, particularly if they have been taking this medicine for a long time. These symptoms can include:

- feeling anxious or unsettled
- difficulty sleeping
- feeling sick
- sweating
- shaky or flu-like feelings.

These symptoms can be unpleasant but are common and usually improve when the dose is reduced slowly. They may begin within a day and often settle within a week. If you notice these symptoms:

- do not reduce the dose any further
- stay on the current dose
- wait until the symptoms settle before the next reduction.

If the withdrawal symptoms continue, worsen, or become hard to cope with, ask your healthcare worker for advice and support.

## What if I am not happy about this change?

The plan to reduce this medicine is about preventing harm and finding safer ways to manage your pain.

However, being asked to stop or reduce a medicine that you have taken for a long time may feel frustrating or difficult, especially when you are already dealing with long-lasting pain or other health problems.

Tell your healthcare worker how you are feeling, so that they can hear your concerns and fully explain the reasons for the change. They can also arrange extra support for you.

## What else can help my pain?

Medicines are only one part of managing long-lasting pain.

Depending on what is available where you live, you may be offered:

- physiotherapy or gentle exercise programmes
- advice about pacing, which means planning activities and rest, so you do not overdo things and trigger flare-ups
- psychological support or pain-management support to help you cope with symptoms and stress
- community services such as local wellbeing groups or support programmes.

These approaches aim to help you cope better day-to-day and to improve your quality of life. Visit the AWTTTC website for useful links and resources.

## How will my healthcare worker support me?

We want to keep you safe, reduce the risk of harm, and support you while this medicine is being reduced.

Your healthcare worker will:

- explain decisions clearly
- listen to your concerns
- monitor symptoms carefully
- adjust plans if needed
- help you find safer ways to manage pain.