

Sodium valproate is an antiepileptic drug that works by increasing the levels of GABA, a neurotransmitter in the brain that has an inhibitory effect. It is used to treat various types of epilepsy, including absence seizures, generalized seizures, and focal seizures. It is also used to treat bipolar disorder, migraines, and other conditions.

Like many other antiepileptic drugs, sodium valproate has potential side effects. Common side effects include dizziness, drowsiness, tremors, weight gain, and hair loss. More serious side effects include liver problems, pancreatitis, and blood disorders. In addition, it is associated with an increased risk of birth defects and developmental disorders if taken during pregnancy.

The risk of birth defects and developmental disorders is highest when sodium valproate is taken during the first trimester of pregnancy. Women of childbearing age who are taking sodium valproate should use effective contraception and discuss the risks and benefits of the medication with their doctor. In some cases, it may be possible to switch to a different medication that is less likely to cause birth defects.

In the UK any female able to have children must have a pregnancy prevention plan in place whilst using sodium valproate and an acknowledgement form needs to be completed annually.

Patients taking sodium valproate should have regular blood tests to monitor liver function and blood cell counts. If any signs of liver problems or blood disorders develop, treatment with sodium valproate may need to be discontinued and alternatives considered.

In summary, sodium valproate is an effective antiepileptic medication that can also be used to treat other conditions. However, it is associated with potential side effects and an increased risk of birth defects and developmental disorders if taken during pregnancy. Patients taking sodium valproate should be monitored regularly, and women of childbearing age should use highly effective contraception and discuss the risks and benefits of the medication with their doctor.