**DRUG NAME:** GABAPENTIN

**General Information:** Gabapentin is an anticonvulsant commonly used to treat seizures and chronic pain. In psychiatry, gabapentin is prescribed to augment the effects of antidepressant drugs, and for anxiety states. Please note that use of gabapentin for these purposes is an “off-label” use of the drug, not currently approved by the FDA. Its mechanism of action is not known, but may involve enhancing the action of the inhibitory neurotransmitter GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid) in the brain. Gabapentin is not thought to be habit-forming.

**Guidelines for Use:** Gabapentin is available in capsules of 100, 300, and 400 mg., and 600 or 800 mg. tablets. An oral solution is also available. It is often started at 300 mg., once daily, then increased to twice daily, then to 300 mg. three times per day, with no more than 12 hours between doses. If needed, the dose can be increased up to 3600 mg. total daily dose. It may be taken with or without food. Do not take this drug within 2 hours of taking an antacid containing aluminum or magnesium, for example Maalox. Gabapentin may need to be taken for 2-4 weeks before significant improvement is seen, though it may have a calming effect from the beginning of treatment. If you forget a dose, skip the missed dose and continue on with your regular dosing schedule; do not take double doses. Store the drug in a dry, tightly-closed, light-resistant container out of the reach of children.

**Precautions:** Do not take this drug if you have ever had an allergic reaction to gabapentin. Inform your clinician if you have any known drug allergies; if you have epilepsy or kidney disease; if you are taking any other drug (prescription or non-prescription), vitamin, supplement or herb; if you will be undergoing anesthesia or surgery while taking this drug. **Inform your clinician if you are or might be pregnant, as gabapentin may cause fetal damage.** It is not known if gabapentin is excreted in breast milk, or if that affects the nursing infant, so it should be used by nursing mothers only if the benefits outweigh the risks. Gabapentin has not been tested in children with psychiatric disorders and is used only in children and adolescents with seizures. Lower doses may be needed in the elderly, particularly if kidney impairment is present.

**This drug may cause drowsiness or dizziness.** If so, avoid driving or operating machinery until you are sure your alertness and coordination are not affected.

Gabapentin should not be stopped abruptly. It should be tapered down gradually under the supervision of your clinician.

Overdoses of gabapentin alone are rarely fatal. However, immediate emergency medical care should be sought in cases of overdose. Symptoms of overdose include double vision, slurred speech, drowsiness, lethargy, and diarrhea.
**Interactions:**

**Alcohol:** Little is known about the interaction of gabapentin and alcohol; drinking is not advised.

**Food/Beverages:** No restrictions except for antacids.

**Other Drugs:** No significant drug interactions are known.

**Side Effects of Gabapentin:**

**Note:** Most side effects taper off during treatment as you become used to the drug.

**Common side effects** (10% or more of users experience; notify your clinician if severe):

--drowsiness
--dizziness
--tremor
--dry mouth
--upset stomach
--decreased coordination
--back-and-forth eye movements

**Less common side effects** (less than 10% of users experience; notify if severe):

--double or blurred vision
--back pain
--weight gain
--swelling of hands or face
--swollen, irritated, bleeding gums

**Long-term Use:** It is usually recommended that you remain on the therapeutic dose of antidepressant and antianxiety medicines for 6-12 months after the condition has responded to treatment. It appears that gabapentin is safe for long-term use. Some people with severe or chronic depression or anxiety may stay on gabapentin for extended periods.