DRUG NAME: LAMICTAL
Chemical name: lamotrigine

General Information: Lamictal is used for maintenance treatment in bipolar disorder to delay the time to occurrence of mood episodes (depression, mania, hypomania, mixed episodes); it has not yet been studied extensively as a treatment for acute mood episodes. It may be used alone or in combination with other medicines. It is one of an expanding group of drugs known as “mood stabilizers,” but to date is the only mood stabilizer with proven efficacy in treating depression as well as mania. The mechanism of action of Lamictal is not completely understood, but may involve stabilization of neuronal cell membranes so that release of excitatory substances is better modulated. Lamictal is not thought to be habit-forming.

Guidelines for Use: Lamictal is available in 25, 100, 150 and 200 mg. tablets. Tablets may be broken in half to get the correct dose. No generic form is available. The usual starting dose is 25 mg. daily for two weeks, then 50 mg. daily for two weeks, then 100 mg. daily for one week, then increases of 25 mg. per week up to a maximum of 200 mg. daily. This schedule is adjusted up or down depending on other medications prescribed. IT IS IMPORTANT TO TAKE THIS MEDICATION EXACTLY AS ORDERED; DO NOT ESCALATE DOSAGE ANY FASTER THAN RECOMMENDED BY YOUR CLINICIAN, AS THIS INCREASES THE RISK OF SERIOUS SIDE EFFECTS. Contact your clinician if you stop taking Lamictal for any reason; do not restart it without instructions from the clinician. Except in emergencies, Lamictal should not be abruptly discontinued; discuss with your clinician. Lamictal may be taken with or without food, but pills should be swallowed intact as chewing them may leave a bitter aftertaste. Maintenance therapy may be continued indefinitely. If you forget to take a dose of Lamictal, skip the missed dose; 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 Lamictal. Inform your clinician if you have any known drug allergies; if you have epilepsy, kidney or liver 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.** It is not yet known if Lamictal is safe during pregnancy and animal studies suggest that fetal harm may occur. It passes into breast milk, so nursing mothers are generally advised not to take Lamictal unless benefits clearly outweigh risks. It has not yet been tested in children with bipolar disorder and is used only in children and adolescents who have seizure disorders. Elderly persons may need lower doses.

Lamictal may cause drowsiness, especially early in treatment. If so, avoid driving or operating equipment until you are sure your alertness and coordination are not affected.

Overdoses of Lamictal may be fatal. Symptoms of overdose include unsteady gait, unusual eye movements, seizure, loss of consciousness, cardiac arrhythmia, and coma. **SEEK EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE IMMEDIATELY.**
Side Effects of Lamictal:

Common side effects (notify your clinician if severe):
--blurred or double vision --dizziness --insomnia or drowsiness
--nausea, vomiting --lack of coordination
--*rash: NOTIFY YOUR CLINICIAN AT ONCE OF ANY RASH-- see below*

Less common side effects (notify your clinician if severe):
--dry mouth --constipation or diarrhea --abdominal or back pain
--runny nose --cough --sore throat --confusion

*In most people who develop a rash while taking Lamictal, symptoms are mild and transient. However, about 1-3 per 1,000 individuals taking Lamictal develop serious skin reactions that may become life-threatening and require hospitalization. A few deaths have occurred. Most rashes have appeared in the first 8 weeks of treatment. The risks of such a reaction are increased if you are also taking another drug called valproic acid (Depakote); if you start Lamictal at a higher-than-prescribed dose; if you increase dosage more quickly than is recommended. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SERIOUS RASH AND NON-SERIOUS RASH IN THE EARLY STAGES, SO IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT YOU CONTACT YOUR CLINICIAN IMMEDIATELY IF YOU DEVELOP ANY OF THE FOLLOWING: SKIN RASH, HIVES, FEVER, SWOLLEN LYMPH GLANDS, SORES AROUND THE EYES OR MOUTH, SWELLING OF THE LIPS OR TONGUE.

Interactions:

Alcohol: You should limit alcohol while taking Lamictal. Alcohol use may contribute to depression, so is not recommended for people experiencing mood swings.

Food/Vitamins: Lamictal may reduce the amount of folate (folic acid) available from your diet. It may be prudent to take a multivitamin or B-complex supplement containing the adult daily requirement of folate (400 mcg).

Other drugs: When valproic acid (Depakote) is added to Lamictal, the blood level of Lamictal is increased significantly and dosage must be adjusted downward. When some other drugs are added to Lamictal, the blood level of Lamictal is decreased significantly and dosage must be adjusted upward. These drugs include oral contraceptives, carbamazepine (Tegretol), phenytoin (Dilantin), phenobarbital, and primidone. LET YOUR CLINICIAN KNOW IF YOU START OR STOP ANY OF THESE DRUGS WHILE TAKING LAMICTAL.

Lamictal decreases the blood levels of some of the hormones in oral contraceptives; it is not known if this reduces contraceptive effectiveness. You should report any changes in your menstrual pattern, such as break-through bleeding, to your clinician. You may want to consider other birth control methods while taking Lamictal.