DRUG NAME:  TEGRETOL, TEGRETOL XR
Generic name:  carbamazepine

General Information:  Tegretol is an anticonvulsant drug used to treat epilepsy and pain syndromes. Though “off-label” and not officially approved by the FDA, it is also used to treat the manic phase of bipolar disorder and for long-term stabilization of mood in bipolar disorder. It may be used for conditions in which agitation, aggression, and impulse control are problems. Sometimes it is used to treat withdrawal from alcohol. The therapeutic mechanism of Tegretol is not clearly understood, but it is known to slow the firing rate of brain cells. Tegretol is not habit-forming.

Guidelines for Use:  Tegretol is available in 100 mg. chewable tablets; in 200 mg. and 300 mg. tablets and capsules; and in liquid form. Some tablets are scored and may be broken to adjust dosage, but tablets should not be broken if they are not scored. Tegretol XR (extended release) is available in 100, 200, and 400 mg. tablets which should never be broken. Generic forms are available. The usual starting dose of Tegretol or Tegretol XR is about 100 - 200 mg. twice daily, sometimes more frequently. It should be taken with food. Doses may be increased slowly to control symptoms up to a usual maximum of 1000 - 1200 mg. total daily dose, sometimes higher. Improvement may be evident in 7 to 10 days, but it can take several more weeks to reach maximum benefit.

The target blood level of Tegretol is 4 - 12 micrograms/milliliter of blood. Blood levels are generally drawn weekly until your therapeutic dosage is determined, and at intervals determined by your clinician after that. Blood levels are routinely drawn in the morning, approximately 12 hours after your evening dose of the drug and BEFORE the morning dose is taken. Blood levels are usually combined with other lab monitoring associated with Tegretol (see below).

If you forget to take this medication but remember within a few hours, take it when you remember. Otherwise, wait until your next dose. Do not take double doses. Store the drug in a dry, tightly-closed, light-resistant container out of the reach of children. Tegretol quickly loses its efficacy in humid environments, so do not store it in the bathroom.

Side Effects of Tegretol and Tegretol ER:

Common side effects: notify your clinician if severe. These side effects usually taper off over time and are not generally a problem if initial dosage is low and increases are introduced gradually.

- GI effects: nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, constipation, loss of appetite
- Drowsiness, lethargy
- Dizziness, unsteady gait, clumsiness, tremor
- Blurry or double vision

Tegretol does not usually cause weight gain.
Tegretol is associated with some rare but serious adverse effects, listed below:

**Abnormalities in blood cells**, usually involving low counts of various blood cells due to bone marrow suppression. Only 1 – 6 Tegretol users per million per year are affected by the most serious blood problems, but the acute loss of cells can be life-threatening if not detected early. A larger percentage of users (1 – 2%) will have a benign decrease in white blood cells with Tegretol which does not generally cause problems and does not herald the onset of the more serious blood cell abnormalities. Blood counts to monitor for these problems are a routine part of beginning treatment with Tegretol. **THE EMERGENCE OF SYMPTOMS SUCH AS FEVER, SORE THROAT, MOUTH ULCERS, SWOLLEN GLANDS, RASH, BRUISING AND ABNORMAL BLEEDING MAY INDICATE THE ONSET OF SERIOUS PROBLEMS AND YOU SHOULD SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION IF THEY ARISE.**

**Hepatitis** and elevated liver enzymes can occur in the first few weeks of treatment with Tegretol. Blood tests to monitor for liver status are also a routine part of early Tegretol treatment. **REPORT SYMPTOMS OF PERSISTENT NAUSEA AND VOMITING, POOR APPETITE, YELLOWSING OF SKIN OR EYES (JAUNDICE), DARKENING OF THE URINE, AND GENERALLY FEELING UNWELL TO YOUR CLINICIAN OR ANOTHER MEDICAL PROVIDER AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.**

**Life-threatening skin conditions**, including a generalized loss of large amounts of skin, are associated with Tegretol on rare occasions. However, 10 – 15 percent of users will have a benign but itchy skin rash in the first few weeks of treatment, and this does not usually indicate the emergence of the more severe problems. Nonetheless, the drug is usually stopped in the case of any rash. **STOP TAKING TEGRETOL AND CALL YOUR PROVIDER IN THE CASE OF RASH.**

**Precautions:** Do not take this drug if you have ever had an allergic reaction or a rash with Tegretol or with any tricyclic antidepressant, since they are structurally similar drugs (amitriptyline, desipramine, imipramine, nortriptyline, others). Inform your clinician if you have any known drug allergies or if you have had previous drug reactions involving blood cells; if you have ever had seizures or been diagnosed with epilepsy, a bleeding or blood disorder, heart or cardiovascular disease, glaucoma, hepatitis or liver disease; if you are taking any other drug (prescription or non-prescription), vitamin, supplement, or herb; if you have a history of heavy use of alcohol or illegal drugs; if you are undergoing anesthesia or surgery while taking this drug. **Inform your clinician if you are or might become pregnant.** Tegretol is known to cause fetal abnormalities including spina bifida; it should not be taken by pregnant women, and is recommended for nursing mothers only if there are no good alternative drug treatments. Children are prescribed Tegretol at times. Systematic studies of use in elderly patients have not been done. Elderly patients treated with Tegretol have at times developed acute confusional states and psychosis, particularly if they had other cognitive problems or disorders before treatment.
This drug often causes drowsiness, especially early in treatment. If so, avoid driving or operating machinery until you are sure your coordination and alertness allow for safe operation.

Do not discontinue this drug without consulting with your clinician. You should be closely monitored for the re-emergence of symptoms when Tegretol is stopped.

Overdoses of Tegretol are potentially fatal. SEEK IMMEDIATE EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE IN CASES OF OVERDOSAGE, PARTICULARLY IF MULTIPLE DRUGS AND/OR ALCOHOL ARE SUSPECTED. Symptoms of overdosage include motor restlessness, muscle twitching and tremor, rapid heart rate, irregular breathing, nausea and vomiting, and drowsiness progressing to unconsciousness and coma.

Interactions:

**Alcohol:** You should avoid alcohol while using Tegretol.

**Food/beverages:** No restrictions.

**Other drugs:** Below are listed drugs that interact with Tegretol in important ways that might require dosage adjustments of one or both drugs. Discuss with your clinician.

Note: Tegretol increases some liver enzymes, resulting in decreased blood levels of several drugs due to faster metabolism. The blood level of Tegretol itself is reduced over time, even at the same dosage level, because of this mechanism. In addition, THE BLOOD LEVEL OF ORAL CONTRACEPTIVES MAY BE REDUCED, WHICH COULD LEAD TO UNWANTED PREGNANCY. YOU SHOULD USE NON-HORMONAL BIRTH CONTROL METHODS WHILE TAKING TEGRETOL.

Tegretol INCREASES the blood levels of the following drugs: amitriptyline (Elavil, others), clonazepam (Klonopin), diazepam (Valium), ethosuximide (Zarontin), lamotrigine (Lamictal), nortriptyline (Pamelor, others), phenobarbital (Luminal), Primidone (Mysoline), tolbutamide (Orinase), warfarin (Coumadin).

Tegretol DECREASES the blood levels of these drugs: desipramine (Norpramin), phenytoin (Dilantin).

These drugs INCREASE THE BLOOD LEVEL OF TEGRETOL: amitriptyline (Elavil, others), aspirin (Tylenol is OK), felbamate (Felbatol).

These drugs DECREASE THE BLOOD LEVEL OF TEGRETOL: Phenobarbital (Luminal), phenytoin (Dilantin), rifampin (Rifadin).

Tegretol may increase the effects of other sedating medications such as antihistamines, sedatives, narcotic pain medicines, muscle relaxants, barbiturates, and anesthetics. Check with your clinician before taking these medications.