DRUG NAME: TOPAMAX

Generic name: topiramate

General Information: Topamax is an anticonvulsant commonly used to treat seizures associated with epilepsy. In psychiatry, Topamax is prescribed to stabilize mood in bipolar disorder. Please note that use of Topamax for bipolar disorder is an “off-label” use of the drug, not currently approved by the FDA. Its mechanism of action is not precisely known, but it may enhance activity of the neurotransmitter GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid), an inhibitory agent, or it may decrease activation of the excitatory glutamate receptor in the brain. There is no evidence that people develop tolerance or addiction to Topamax, but studies of the abuse or dependence potential of this drug have not been done.

Guidelines for Use: Topamax is available in 25, 50, 100 and 200 mg. tablets. Because of the bitter taste, tablets should not be broken. It is also available as 15 or 25 mg “sprinkle” capsules which can be swallowed whole or opened and sprinkled on food. No generic form is available at present. The usual starting dose is 25 or 50 mg. once daily, taken at bedtime. Dosage is increased approximately weekly by 25 to 50 mg. up to 200 mg. twice daily, depending on response. It may be taken with or without food. Some people notice calming or sedating effects right away, but it may take 2 to 4 weeks to stabilize the mood in the normal range. If you forget to take the medicine, skip the missed dose and continue on 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 or negative reaction to it. Inform your clinician if you have any known drug allergies; if you have kidney or liver disease or glaucoma or a history of kidney stones; 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. Topamax may cause fetal damage. It is not known if Topamax is present in breast milk, or if that affects the nursing infant, so it should be used in nursing mothers only if the benefits clearly outweigh the risks. This drug has been tested and found safe in children and adolescents with seizure disorders, but is not yet frequently used in these populations in psychiatry. Lower doses may be needed in elderly persons with kidney impairment, but otherwise age is not a contraindication to using Topamax.

This drug often causes drowsiness or dizziness, at least initially. If so, avoid driving or operating machinery until you are sure your alertness and coordination are not affected.

Little is known about overdoses of Topamax, since few have been reported. Immediate emergency medical treatment should be sought in all cases of overdose.

Topamax, like other mood stabilizers, should not be stopped abruptly. Consult your clinician before stopping this drug.
Interactions:

**Alcohol:** May be additively sedating with alcohol; use extreme caution or avoid alcohol.

**Food:** No restrictions. It is important to have adequate fluid intake while taking Topamax, as it can cause kidney stones.

**Other drugs:** Topamax may reduce the effectiveness of oral contraceptives; you may want to use duplicate birth control methods to reduce risk of unplanned pregnancy. Women on birth control pills should report abnormal bleeding that occurs while taking Topamax. Persons taking other anticonvulsants, whether for seizure control or mood stabilization, may need to have their dosage of the other drug adjusted when starting Topamax; discuss with your clinician.

Side Effects of Topamax:

NOTIFY YOUR CLINICIAN IMMEDIATELY IF YOU DEVELOP BLURRED VISION OR EYE PAIN WHILE TAKING TOPAMAX. These side effects are rare, but, if left untreated, may lead to glaucoma, a serious eye problem that sometimes results in vision loss.

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

- Drowsiness, fatigue
- Memory and word-finding problems
- Poor concentration, confusion
- Dizziness
- Low appetite, weight loss

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

- Tremor, anxiety
- Upset stomach, vomiting
- Constipation
- Abnormal eye movements
- Kidney stones

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

**Long-term Use:** Most people with bipolar disorder are maintained on mood stabilizing medicines for long periods of time. It appears that Topamax is safe for long-term use.