

Topiramate tablets are used to manage the symptoms of Idiopathic Intracranial Hypertension and other conditions.

As with all drugs some people will have side-effects. This leaflet sets out what you need to know if your doctor has prescribed you topiramate.

## What is topiramate?

Topiramate is a medication that alters the sensitivity of nerve cells and changes their reactivity to certain excitatory and inhibitory signals. It also has a small amount of carbonic anhydrase inhibitor activity (similar to acetazolamide).

It is most commonly used for treatment of epilepsy and migraines, but it is also useful for the treatment of Idiopathic Intracranial Hypertension (IIH).

## Why is it used in IIH?

Topiramate can reduce the production of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF), which is the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. This has been shown in the lab and in small studies.

Topiramate, previously designed to be an anti-epilepsy drug, has been shown to have benefits in treating migraine headaches, which are common in IIH. One study showed participants using topiramate tended to have greater weight loss compared to those using acetazolamide.

## What does your doctor need to know about you?

Topiramate should **NOT** be prescribed if:

- You have taken it before and had an allergic reaction (not side effect)
- You are pregnant.

It is helpful for your doctor to know if you have any of the following problems

- Kidney problems
- Liver problems
- You require dialysis
- A history of metabolic acidosis (your body making too much acid)

They may not prescribe topiramate as it might make you unwell.

Doctors may also be cautious in prescribing topiramate if you

- Have had renal/kidney stones
- Require dialysis
- Have a history of depression, suicidal thoughts or other mental health concerns.

## **Are you taking any other medications?**

If you are taking any other medications, you will need to inform your doctor before you take topiramate. The following drugs may cause an interaction if taken with topiramate:

- Phenytoin or carbamazepine lowers the levels of topiramate available in the body
- Taking valproic acid can cause hypothermia (low body temperature) or hypoammonaemia (low ammonium)
- Some contraceptives containing oestrogen are less effective (this may mean you could become pregnant if sexually active)
- Lithium levels may be higher
- Using other carbonic anhydrase inhibitors (such as acetazolamide) can increase risk of kidney stones and metabolic acidosis
- Amitriptyline may work better
- Warfarin may not work as well

## What are the possible side effects?

Common side effects = reduced appetite, depression, difficulty with language/speaking, insomnia, difficulty with coordination, difficulty with concentration, dizziness, paraesthesia (pins and needles), fatigue, memory problems, vision disturbances, tremor, diarrhoea, nausea and kidney stones.

Rare side effects = sudden blurring of vision, pain and redness of the eye has occurred in the first month of starting Topiramate. This can indicate raised pressure in the eye (glaucoma). If you develop these symptoms, especially in the first few weeks of starting the medication you should tell your doctor immediately.

The common reasons for stopping topiramate from side effects are: paraesthesia (7%), fatigue (4%), nausea (4%), difficulty with concentration/attention (3%), insomnia (3%), anorexia (2%), and dizziness (2%). Some patients have noted that keeping well hydrated can help lessen these side effects.

## How do I take it?

Topiramate comes in tablet form (or sprinkles for children). The tablet sizes may be 25mg, 50mg, 100mg, or 200mg.

The optimal dose will vary between patients. Usual practice is to start at 25mg, slowly increasing the dose to a potential maximum of 400mg.

Side effects may be more obvious with higher doses and may be better tolerated with a slower increase in medication.

Absorbing topiramate is not affected by food, so you can take it with or without meals.

## Can I take topiramate if I am pregnant?

Topiramate is **NOT** recommended in pregnancy. It can cause birth defects when taken during pregnancy, you might need to increase your contraception while you are taking topiramate. Let your doctor know if you are considering planning a family.

Some contraception medications are not affected by topiramate (such as the contraceptive implant), but others can be less effective so higher doses may be required.

You must tell your doctor immediately if you fall pregnant while on topiramate.

### **Can I take topiramate if I am breast feeding?**

Topiramate is passed into breast milk, and can cause your baby to have diarrhoea, tiredness, irritability and poor growth.

Considering taking topiramate during breast feeding is a balance of risks and benefits for both mother and baby. While it is not absolutely ruled out, other methods for control of IIH and headaches may be more suitable. Please discuss this with your doctor.

### **Are there other considerations I might need to discuss with my doctor?**

Operating machinery, or vehicles may be dangerous if you experience dizziness, difficulty concentrating, or have visual disturbances while taking topiramate.

## Where can I get more information?

IIHUK website: [www.iih.org.uk](http://www.iih.org.uk)

Topiramate package leaflet: User information:

[www.medicines.org.uk/emc/files/pil.1976.pdf](http://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/files/pil.1976.pdf)

NHS website:

[www.nhs.uk/medicines/topiramate/](http://www.nhs.uk/medicines/topiramate/)

## Write notes for your appointment here:

A team of people contributed to this booklet. It was written by A. Fong. Critically reviewed by A. Sinclair and S. Mollan. It was assessed in the draft stage by the ophthalmology nursing team at University Hospitals Birmingham (UHB). It was reviewed by a group of patients who have IIH and assessed by friends and family that attended the Joint Idiopathic Intracranial Hypertension clinic at UHB. It was critically reviewed by the IIHUK trustees. S Mollan is responsible for the final version. The views expressed in this booklet are of the authors and not their employers or other organisations.

Please note we have made every effort to ensure the content of this is correct at time of publication, but, remember that information about the condition and drugs may change. This information booklet is for general education only. **For full details see the information leaflet that comes with the medicine.**

Version 3.0 (11<sup>th</sup> December 2019). Review by December 2020.