

Vigilance is required when prescribing pregabalin due to the risk of dependence and the potential for illegal diversion and medicinal misuse.¹

- The relaxant and sedative effects of pregabalin make it desirable for use outside of its three licensed indications.² Patients misusing pregabalin describe improved sociability, euphoria, relaxation and a sense of calm.³ Pregabalin may be used to enhance the euphoric effects of other drugs such as opioids.²
- Drug-related death figures compiled by the Health Research Board have shown an increase in deaths where pregabalin was implicated, from 14 in 2013 to 45 in 2017.⁴

The Irish Medical Council advise all doctors prescribing pregabalin to follow best practice guidelines and to **only prescribe when absolutely required** (September 2019).

Licensed Indications

Pregabalin is licensed for three therapeutic indications in adults:

- Treatment of peripheral and central neuropathic pain
- Treatment of generalised anxiety disorder
- Adjunctive therapy in patients with partial seizures with or without secondary generalisation.

The dose range is **150 mg - 600 mg** per day (in either two or three divided doses).⁵

Counsel Patients Initiating Treatment on:

- The risk of harm with pregabalin including dependence⁶
- The risk of potentially fatal interactions between pregabalin and **alcohol**, and with other central nervous system (CNS) depressants, particularly **opioids**⁷
- The effect on ability to drive or operate machinery safely⁵
- The potential for withdrawal symptoms on discontinuation.⁵

Appropriate Prescribing

- Undertake a risk/benefit assessment prior to prescribing
- Prescribe for a trial period to ascertain if effective
- Review on a regular basis for ongoing effectiveness.

In pain management, pregabalin is licensed for the treatment of **neuropathic pain only**.

Interactions with Central Nervous System Depressants

Pregabalin has adverse effects on the CNS.

These effects may be additive if pregabalin is taken with other CNS depressants e.g. antidepressants, antipsychotics, anxiolytics, hypnotics and opioid analgesics.⁶

- Respiratory failure and coma have been reported in patients taking pregabalin and other CNS depressants.⁵

Potential for Misuse, Abuse or Dependence

- Exercise caution if prescribing pregabalin for patients with a history of substance abuse. **Monitor patients for symptoms of misuse, abuse or dependence.**⁵

Side-effects

Very common side-effects are:

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| Dizziness | Somnolence | Headache | |
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Common side-effects include:⁵

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|-----------|----------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Confusion | Memory impairment | Sedation | Blurred vision |
| Vertigo | Erectile dysfunction | Oedema | Muscle cramp |
| Fatigue | Weight increase | Vomiting | Dry mouth |
| Amnesia | Increased appetite | Constipation | Nasopharyngitis |
| Diplopia | Flatulence | Arthralgia | Insomnia |

Diversion

- Consider the 'street value' of pregabalin and monitor for signs of diversion e.g. requests for increased doses and quantities, early prescriptions or replacement of 'lost' prescriptions.

Withdrawal Symptoms

- Can occur following discontinuation of short-term and long-term use.
- Symptoms include anxiety, convulsions, depression, diarrhoea, dizziness, flu syndrome, headache, hyperhidrosis, insomnia, nausea, nervousness and pain.⁵

Renal Impairment

Dosage reduction is required in patients with impaired renal function.

Dosage reduction must be individualised based on creatinine clearance (see SmPC).⁵

Tapering Dose

Public Health England (2014) suggest a gradual dose taper:
Reduce the dose weekly by a maximum of 50 – 100 mg.⁶

Specialist advice may be required to manage patients dependent on pregabalin.

- Refer to www.drugs.ie to access local services provided by the Addiction Services or Drugs and Alcohol Task Forces.

References: 1. Early Warning and Emerging Trends Subcommittee of the National Advisory Committee on Drugs and Alcohol (June 2016). Clinical Advisory 2. Pregabalin Fact Sheet. Accessed at www.drugs.ie/pregabalin on 12/12/2019 3. Pregabalin Information. Accessed at www.drugs.ie/pregabalin on 12/12/2019 4. Health Research Board (2019). National Drug-Related Deaths Index 2008 to 2017 Data. Accessed at www.hrb.ie/publications on 12/12/2019 5. SmPC Lyrica® hard capsules. May 2019. Accessed at www.medicines.ie on 12/12/2019 6. Public Health England (2014). Advice for prescribers on the risk of the misuse of pregabalin and gabapentin 7. British National Formulary. October 2019.

Abbreviations: CNS: Central Nervous System; SmPC: Summary of Product Characteristics

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