Ethosuximide for preventing seizures

This leaflet is about the use of ethosuximide for preventing seizures. (Seizures may be also called convulsions or fits.)

This leaflet has been written specifically about the use of this medicine in children. The information may differ from that provided by the manufacturer. Please read this leaflet carefully. Keep it somewhere safe so that you can read it again.

Do not stop giving ethosuximide suddenly, as your child may have more seizures.

Name of drug
Ethosuximide
Brand names: Zarontin®

Why is it important for my child to take this medicine?
It is important that your child takes ethosuximide regularly so that they have fewer seizures.

What is ethosuximide available as?
• Capsules: 250mg
• Liquid medicine: 250 mg in 5 mL

When should I give ethosuximide?
• Ethosuximide is usually given twice each day, once in the morning and once in the evening. Ideally, these times are 10–12 hours apart, for example some time between 7 and 8 am, and between 7 and 8 pm.
• Very occasionally the medicine can be given three times a day. This should be in the morning, early afternoon and at bedtime. Ideally, these times are at least 6 hours apart, for example 8 am, 2 pm and 8 pm.

Give the medicine at about the same time(s) each day so that this becomes part of your child’s daily routine, which will help you to remember.

How much should I give?
Your doctor will work out the amount of ethosuximide (the dose) that is right for your child. The dose will be shown on the medicine label.
Your doctor will start your child on a low dose and then gradually increase it over a few days or weeks to help your child get used to the medicine. If you are not sure how much to give, check with your doctor or pharmacist.

It is important that you follow your doctor’s instructions about how much to give.

How should I give it?

Capsules should be swallowed with a glass of water, milk or juice. Your child should not chew the capsule.

Liquid medicine: Measure out the right amount using an oral syringe or medicine spoon. You can get these from your pharmacist. Do not use a kitchen teaspoon as it will not give the right amount.

When should the medicine start working?
It may take a few weeks for ethosuximide to work properly, so your child may still have seizures during this time. This is because the amount of medicine has to be increased slowly. Continue to give the medicine in the way that you have been told to by your doctor. Ethosuximide may not stop your child’s seizures completely. If you are worried about whether it is helping, contact your doctor but continue to give the medicine.

What if my child is sick (vomits)?
• If your child is sick less than 30 minutes after having a dose of ethosuximide, give them the same dose again.
• If your child is sick more than 30 minutes after having a dose of ethosuximide, you do not need to give them another dose. Wait until the next normal dose.

What if I forget to give it?
If you usually give it twice a day:
• If you remember up to 4 hours after you should have given a dose, give your child the missed dose. For example, if you usually give a dose at about 7 am, you can give the missed dose at any time up to 11 am.
• If you remember after that time, do not give the missed dose. Just give the next dose as usual.

If you usually give it three times a day:
Do not give the missed dose. Just give the next dose as usual.

Never give a double dose of ethosuximide.

What if I give too much?
You are unlikely to do harm if you give an extra dose of ethosuximide by mistake. If you are concerned that you may have given too much, contact your doctor or the NZ National Poisons Centre 0800 764 766 (0800 POISON). Have the medicine or packaging with you if you telephone for advice.

Are there any possible side-effects?
We use medicines to make our children better, but sometimes they have other effects that we don’t want (side-effects).

Side effects you must do something about
• If your child starts to have more fits than usual, contact your doctor or take them to hospital straight away.
• If your child develops a fever (temperature above 38°C), sore throat, mouth ulcers, bruising or bleeding, contact your doctor or take them to hospital straight away.

Other side-effects you need to know about
Ethosuximide usually causes only mild side-effects, which should get better as your child’s body gets used to the medicine. If they are still a problem after 2 weeks, or you are worried, contact your doctor, but continue to give ethosuximide.
• Your child may be feel sick (nausea) or be sick (vomit) or have stomach ache or diarrhoea, or go off their food.
• Your child may have a headache or feel dizzy or sleepy (drowsy), and they may have sleep disturbances such as difficulty getting to sleep.
• They may have hiccups.
• Your child may seem less alert than normal, and may say they cannot think clearly, or their coordination may be affected. They may also have changes in mood or become irritable more easily.

There may, sometimes, be other side-effects that are not listed above. If you notice anything unusual and are concerned, contact your doctor. You can report any suspected side-effects to your doctor, pharmacist, or the Centre for Adverse Reactions Monitoring (CARM) at https://nzphvc.otago.ac.nz/carm/.

Can other medicines be given at the same time as ethosuximide?
• You can give your child medicines that contain paracetamol or ibuprofen, unless your doctor has told you not to.
• Check with your doctor or pharmacist before giving any other medicines to your child. This includes herbal or complementary medicines.

Epilepsy and pregnancy
• Pregnancy presents a risk to both the mother with epilepsy and her unborn baby. If your daughter has sex, it is essential that she uses adequate contraception to prevent an unplanned pregnancy.
• If your daughter thinks that she may be pregnant, it is important that she sees your family doctor as early as possible. Your daughter should keep taking her medication until she sees her doctor.

Ethosuximide and pregnancy
• The risk of ethosuximide causing harm to an unborn baby is low but your daughter must always speak to her doctor before trying to conceive.
• The oral contraceptive pill can be used safely by women or girls who are taking ethosuximide.

General advice about medicines for seizures
Do not suddenly stop giving any of these medicines to your child, as they may have a seizure. If you are worried, contact your doctor but carry on giving the medicine to your child as usual.

If your child seems to have more seizures than usual, contact your doctor.

If your doctor decides to stop a particular medicine, they will discuss this with you. You will usually reduce the dose bit by bit.

www.nzfchildren.org.nz

This is an adaption of Medicines for Children: information for parents and carers, from www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk, © NPPG, RCPCH and WellChild 2011, all rights reserved regarding Ethosuximide for preventing seizures version 1. X. To be reviewed by: X. The original information has been prepared by The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), the Neonatal and Paediatric Pharmacists Group (NPPG) and WellChild. The New Zealand Medicines Formulary is responsible for the adaptation to New Zealand conditions. Medicines can be used in different ways in different patients. This information provides guidance and practical advice only, and it is important that you contact your doctor or pharmacist if you are uncertain about the drugs your child has been prescribed. Feedback on the contents of the brochure may be directed to the New Zealand Formulary for Children staff@nzformulary.org