



Our Recommendations

The anticonvulsants are a group of drugs used primarily to treat seizure disorders. But they are also widely prescribed to treat people with bipolar disorder (also called manic depression), certain types of pain caused by nerve damage or trauma, and a condition called fibromyalgia.

To help you and your doctor choose an anticonvulsant medicine if you need one, *Consumer Reports* has evaluated the drugs in this category based on their effectiveness, safety, and cost. This 2-page brief is a summary of a 22-page report you can access on the Internet at www.CRBESTBUYDRUGS.org. You can also learn about other drugs we've analyzed on this free Web site. Our independent evaluations are based on scientific reviews conducted by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. Grants from the Engelberg Foundation and National Library of Medicine help fund *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*.

DO YOU NEED AN ANTICONVULSANT?

If you are diagnosed with bipolar disorder, nerve pain, or fibromyalgia, your need for an anticonvulsant may not be all that clear. Other treatments and drugs exist for all three conditions that may be better initial choices, particularly for people with bipolar disorder. The anticonvulsants are better accepted in treating specific types of nerve pain. If you have one of these three conditions and you get no benefit from other drugs, your doctor may consider an anticonvulsant.

Some anticonvulsants have been linked to clear clinical benefits and are approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in treating bipolar disorder, nerve pain, or fibromyalgia.

They are generally safe, but in rare cases can cause serious side effects. Newer anticonvulsants marketed since the late 1990s have sometimes been put forth as safer and posing less risk of adverse effects than older ones. Studies do not support this conclusion.

Taking cost, dosing convenience, and the evidence for effectiveness, safety, and adverse effects into consideration, we have chosen the following as *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* if your doctor and you have decided to try an anticonvulsant:

- *Generic carbamazepine* – for treating the manic phase of bipolar disorder or trigeminal neuralgia, a type of nerve pain that affects a facial nerve
- *Generic valproic acid* – for treating the manic phase of bipolar disorder
- *Lamotrigine (Lamictal)* – for treating both the manic and depressive phases of bipolar disorder
- *Generic gabapentin* – for treating the nerve pain associated with diabetes or herpes zoster infection (shingles)
- *Pregabalin (Lyrica)* – for treating the nerve pain associated with diabetes or herpes zoster infection (shingles)

Lamictal, Lyrica and higher doses of both generic gabapentin and generic valproic acid are relatively costly medicines. But the evidence for their effectiveness, for the indications given, warrant their selection as *Best Buys* providing good value for the money.

This information and our report were last updated in September 2007.

Summary of Effectiveness for Selected Anticonvulsants*

Drug	Bipolar Disorder	Nerve Pain
Carbamazepine	Mood stabilization in up to 70% of people in studies (manic phase only)	75% with trigeminal neuralgia (facial pain) get some or complete relief
Valproic Acid	Mood stabilization in up to 60% of people in studies (manic phase only)	60% with shingles pain get some or complete relief
Gabapentin	No evidence	Good results in treating shingles pain and diabetic nerve pain; possible effectiveness in treating spinal cord injury pain and nerve pain related to cancer
Pregabalin (Lyrica)	No evidence	Up to 58% with shingles pain and 48% with diabetic nerve pain get relief
Lamotrigine (Lamictal)	Relief from depressive phase of bipolar disorder, lasting at least 7 months in one key study	Possible effectiveness treating nerve pain that follows a stroke and pain associated with trigeminal neuralgia
Topiramate (Topamax)	No evidence	Some evidence for effectiveness in treating diabetic nerve pain, with 36% of patients experiencing relief

* Results are from a range of studies.

The Anticonvulsants – Dosing and Costs*

The older drugs are in italics under "Generic Name and Dose." The newer ones are in regular text.

	Generic Name and Dose	Brand Name ¹	Number of Pills Per Day ²	Total Daily Dose	Average Monthly Cost ³
	<i>Carbamazepine 200mg tablet</i>	Epitol	Two-Five	400-1,000mg	\$14-\$35
	<i>Carbamazepine 200mg tablet</i>	Tegretol	Two-Five	400-1,000mg	\$58-\$145
CR BEST BUY	<i>Carbamazepine 200mg tablet</i>	Generic	Two-Five	400-1,000mg	\$6-\$15
	<i>Carbamazepine 100mg SR tablet⁴</i>	Carbatrol	Two-Four	200-400mg	\$98-\$196
	<i>Carbamazepine 100mg SR tablet</i>	Tegretol XR ⁵	Two-Four	200-400mg	\$36-\$72
	<i>Divalproex 250mg tablet</i>	Depakote	Two-Four	500-1,000mg	\$114-\$228
	<i>Divalproex 250mg SR tablet</i>	Depakote ER	One-Four	250-1,000mg	\$57-\$228
	<i>Ethotoin 250mg tablet</i>	Peganone	Five-Ten	1,250-2,500mg	\$220-\$440
	Gabapentin 400mg capsule	Neurontin	Two-Four	800-1,600mg	\$140-\$280
CR BEST BUY	Gabapentin 400mg tablet	Generic	Two-Four	800-1,600mg	\$92-\$184
CR BEST BUY	Lamotrigine 100mg tablet	Lamictal	One-Two	100-200mg	\$170-\$340
CR BEST BUY	Lamotrigine 5mg dissolving tablet	Lamictal	One-Three	5-15mg	\$162-\$486
CR BEST BUY	Lamotrigine 5mg dissolving tablet	Generic	One-Three	5-15mg	\$123-\$369
	Levetiracetam 500mg tablet	Keppra	Two-Six	1,000-3,000mg	\$220-\$660
	Oxycarbazepine 300mg tablet	Trileptal	Two-Five	600-1,500mg	\$222-\$555
CR BEST BUY	Pregabalin 100mg capsule	Lyrica	Two-Three	200-300mg	\$162-\$243
	<i>Phenytoin 100mg ER capsule</i>	Dilantin	One-Four	100-400mg	\$13-\$39
	<i>Phenytoin 100mg ER capsule</i>	Generic	One-Four	100-400mg	\$10-\$40
	Tiagabine 4mg tablet	Gabitril	Two-Four	8-16mg	\$232-\$464
	Topiramate 100mg tablet	Topamax	Two	200mg	\$426
	Topiramate 25mg capsule	Topamax	Two	50mg	\$220
	<i>Valproic Acid 250mg capsule</i>	Depakene	Two-Eight	500-2,000mg	\$184-\$736
CR BEST BUY	<i>Valproic Acid 250mg capsule</i>	Generic	Two-Eight	500-2,000mg	\$15-\$120
	Zonisamide 50mg capsule	Zonegran	Two-Four	100-200mg	\$96-192
	Zonisamide 50mg capsule	Generic	Two-Four	100-200mg	\$68-\$136

* Selected doses. For the complete table, see our full anticonvulsant report at www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org.

1. "Generic" indicates that this is the generic version of a brand name drug at the dose given.

2. The dose at which anticonvulsants work can vary widely.

3. Prices reflect nationwide retail averages for April 2007. They are rounded to the nearest dollar. Information derived by *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* from data provided by Wolters Kluwer Health, Pharmaceutical Audit Suite.

4. SR=Sustained release

5. XR/ER=Extended release

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