



# What Meds

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## WHAT MEDS?

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## Psychiatric Medications

**REVIEWED**

*By Chris Tighe at 12:07 pm, Feb 03, 2015*

### Carbamazepine

**Brand Name:** Tegretol, Epitol, Atretol, Carbatrol, Equetro

#### Overview

Tegretol is a common brand name for Carbamazepine. Tegretol is an anticonvulsant and a mood stabilizer. Tegretol can be used alone, or it may be used with lithium or a neuroleptic (a type of drug that reduces confusion and agitation) when used to treat certain manic conditions. The exact mechanism of action of Tegretol in treating bipolar disorder is unknown, but it stabilizes the inactive state of sodium channels in neurons, making the neurons less excitable.

Tegretol's effects can be felt about two hours after it is taken, though it may require three months of more of therapy to determine if it reduces the amount and severity of seizures. When used to relieve nerve pain, effects are usually felt in 24 to 48 hours.

#### Why is this drug prescribed?

Tegretol is FDA-approved to treat:

- Seizure disorder: adults and children
- Trigeminal neuralgia (a type of nerve pain): adults
- Glossopharyngeal neuralgia: adults
- Manic and mixed episodes of bipolar I disorder: adults (Equetro extended-release tablets only)

It is also used to treat:

- Pain associated with shingles
- Alcohol withdrawal
- Cocaine withdrawal
- Abnormally aggressive behavior
- Migraine headaches

#### How much of this drug is typically used?

Tablets: 100, 200, 300, 400mg

Chewable tablets: 100, 200mg

Suspension: 100mg/5ml

Equetro extended-release capsules: 100, 200, 300mg

#### Warnings and Precautions

Tegretol is generally not recommended for children under six years old. However, it has been used in children under six to treat epileptic seizures.

Tegretol is not addictive. Suddenly discontinuing this drug can cause withdrawal symptoms such as mania or depression. Dosage should be gradually tapered.

Tegretol can cause dizziness and sleepiness. Patients should not drive or operate heavy machinery until they are certain that Tegretol does not affect the ability to safely engage in these activities.

Tegretol reduces the effectiveness of oral contraceptives. A non-hormonal method of birth control should be used instead.

Tegretol can cause photosensitivity and can reduce sweating which impairs the body's ability to adapt to heat. Patients should avoid saunas and other very hot environments.

When taken for epilepsy, Tegretol should not be discontinued suddenly; doing so could cause continuous epileptic attacks without return to consciousness, leading to possible severe brain damage and death.

For Pregnant or Nursing Mothers: There exists a small chance that Tegretol, like all major antiepileptic drugs, increases the risk of malformation, and rare cases have been reported. Conclusive results have not yet been found. Tegretol passes into breast milk, and may cause sleepiness in the nursing infant.

### **Contraindications**

Tegretol should **Not** be used for people with the following medical conditions:

- Hypersensitivity or allergy to Tegretol or a heterocyclic antidepressant
- Liver disease
- Serious blood disorder
- AV heart block
- Acute intermittent porphyria
- A history of bone marrow depression

### **Adverse Reactions**

Tegretol may cause the following reactions:

- Dizziness
- Drowsiness
- High fever
- Blurred vision
- Clumsiness / unsteadiness
- Pigmentation in eyes
- Infection
- Weakness
- Abnormal bleeding
- Constipation
- Indigestion
- Dry mouth and throat
- Skin changes
- Yellowing of skin / eyes
- Impaired urination
- Decreased sense of taste

- Loss of appetite
- Poor coordination
- Mental changes
- Nausea / vomiting
- Aching joints
- Diarrhea
- Low white blood cell count
- Fatigue
- Confusion
- Male infertility
- Photosensitivity
- Agranulocytosis (a serious or even fatal deficiency of certain blood cells)
- Aplastic anemia (low red and white blood cell production)
- Liver irritation
- Vitamin D deficiency
- Low thyroid hormones
- GI upset
- Headache
- Anxiety
- Memory problems
- Back pain

Rarely:

- Suicidality
- Severe rash
- Depression
- Chest pain
- Birth defects when used by pregnant women
- Bone marrow suppression (extremely rare)
- Yellowing of skin or eyes

### **Interactions with Drugs and Other Substances**

Drugs or substances that may interact with Tegretol are:

- MAO Inhibitors (within 14 days) – serious, even fatal interactions can occur when taken with Tegretol
- Alcohol – when taken with Tegretol can dangerously lower blood pressure
- Seldane (terfenadine), Prozac (fluoxetine), Luvox (fluvoxamine), and rifampin - can lead to drug toxicity
- Tranquilizers, hypnotics, and narcotics – Tegretol can increase the effects of these drugs
- Adrenocortical steroids, antidepressants, birth control pills, Sandimmune (cyclosporine), Doxy-II and Vibramycin (doxycycline), Plendil (felodipine), Haldol (haloperidol), DynaCirc (isradipine), Sporanox (itraconazole), tetracyclines, Depakene (valproic acid), and Coumadin (warfarin) – Tegretol can decrease the effects of these drugs
- Clozaril (clozapine) – can cause serious bone marrow suppression when taken with

### Tegretol

- Felbatol (felbamate) – can reduce the body's levels of Tegretol
- Lithium - taken with Tegretol can cause neurological problems such as confusion, tremors, and weakness
- Dilantin (phenytoin) – can impair seizure control due to fluctuation of blood levels
- Theo-Dur (theophylline) - when taken with Tegretol, the effects of both of these drugs can decrease
- Tagamet (cimetidine), Danocrine (danazol), Cardizem (diltiazem), flu shots, INH (isoniazid), erythromycin and other macrolide antibiotics, nicotinamide, Darvon (propoxyphene), Norvir (ritonavir), and Calan / Isoptin (verapamil) – these drugs may increase the effects of Tegretol
- Phenobarbital and Biaxin (clarithromycin) - can increase the toxicity of Tegretol

### Research Studies and Use in Child Psychiatry

Carbamazepine is often used off-label to treat bipolar disorder in children. It is widely used to treat seizure disorders in children, so its side effects are well known, and it has been shown to be effective in treating mania in adult bipolar disorder. Unfortunately, there are no controlled studies and little anecdotal data on the use of carbamazepine for pediatric bipolar disorder. It is not as commonly used as other mood stabilizers because it is an older medication, it has many interactions with other medications, and because of its potential side effects. Equetro is an extended-release formulation of carbamazepine that recently obtained FDA approval for use to treat mania in adults. A large placebo-controlled study of Equetro in children with bipolar disorder is being considered.

### Sources

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