

Medication Information

Depakote

Depakote (divalproex sodium) belongs to a group of medications called anticonvulsants, used to control seizure disorders. In psychiatry, it is used as a mood stabilizer in people with bipolar disorders. The usual daily dose is between 750 and 3,000 mg.

Precautions: Depakote must be taken on a regular basis to be of benefit and should not be discontinued suddenly. Liver problems, which can be severe, may develop, especially in the first six months of treatment, and it should not be used in patients with liver dysfunction. Also, low white blood cell or platelet counts and rarely pancreatitis may occur. Tests to monitor liver function and blood count are an important part of treatment. Pregnant women should not take Depakote because of possible harm to the fetus, and it should be given with caution to nursing mothers. Because it may cause drowsiness or dizziness, patients receiving this medication should not engage in hazardous activities or operate motor vehicles until these symptoms subside.

Common side effects include: nausea, drowsiness, dizziness, rash, hair loss, itching, and weight gain. Other adverse effects not listed here may occur. Contact your physician if you develop any unusual or disturbing symptoms.

Alternative Treatments: Other medications used as mood stabilizers include: Lithium, Tegretol, Trileptal, Lamictal, Topomax, Neurontin, Gabitril, and atypical antipsychotics. Supplementary omega 3 fatty acids have been found helpful in some people with milder mood swings. "Natural" treatments are not as well studied, may be manufactured with less quality control than medications, can cause adverse reactions, and are usually less predictably effective than medication. Also, various forms of psychotherapy are often beneficial. Left untreated, bipolar disorder tends to become more severe and chronic.