

Our Recommendations

Anticonvulsants are used primarily to treat seizure disorders. But they are also widely prescribed to treat people with bipolar disorder, certain types of pain caused by nerve damage or trauma, and fibromyalgia.

To help you and your doctor choose an anticonvulsant medicine if you need one, *Consumers 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 ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs. 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.

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. If you have one of these three conditions and you get no benefit from other drugs, your doctor might consider an anticonvulsant.

Our independent evaluations are based on scientific reviews conducted by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. These materials were made possible by a grant from the state Attorney General Consumer and Prescriber Education Grant Program, which is funded by the multi-state settlement of consumer fraud claims regarding the marketing of the prescription drug Neurontin (gabapentin).

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.

Anticonvulsants can cause serious side effects, including an increased risk of suicide and life-threatening skin rashes. Newer anticonvulsants marketed since the late 1990s have sometimes been touted as safer than older ones. No large, good quality studies have tested this directly, but small, short-term studies that compared the drugs don't support such a 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 phases of bipolar disorder and for trigeminal neuralgia, a type of nerve pain that affects facial trigeminal nerves.
- *Generic valproic acid or generic divalproex* — for treating the manic phases of bipolar disorder.
- *Generic lamotrigine* — for treating the depressive phases of bipolar disorder.
- *Generic gabapentin* – for treating nerve pain associated with diabetes or herpes zoster infection (shingles), and for treating fibromyalgia.

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Summary of Effectiveness for Selected Anticonvulsants

Drug	Bipolar Disorder	Nerve Pain
Carbamazepine	Mood stabilization in 40 to 70% of people in studies (manic phase only)	75% with trigeminal neuralgia (facial pain) get some relief and about one in three get almost complete pain relief
Valproic Acid	Mood stabilization in 40 to 60% of people in studies (manic phase only)	60% with shingles pain get some or complete relief
Gabapentin	Not found to be effective in limited studies	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	28 to 58% with shingles pain and 40 to 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)	Not found to be effective in limited studies	Some evidence for effectiveness in treating diabetic nerve pain, with 36% of patients experiencing relief

The Anticonvulsants — Dosing and Costs*

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

\$ indicates the dose of that drug is available for a low monthly cost through programs offered by large chain stores. For example, Kroger, Sam’s Club, Target, and Walmart offer a month’s supply of selected generic drugs for \$4 or a three-month supply for \$10. Other chain stores, such as Costco, CVS, Kmart, and Walgreens, offer similar programs. Some programs have restrictions or membership fees, so check the details carefully for restrictions and to make sure your drug is covered.

	Generic Name and Dose	Brand Name ¹	Number of Pills Per Day ²	Total Daily Dose	Average Monthly Cost ³
CR BEST BUY	<i>Carbamazepine 100 mg chewable tablet</i>	Generic	Three	300 mg	\$21 \$
	<i>Carbamazepine 200 mg tablet</i>	Tegretol	Three	600 mg	\$115
CR BEST BUY	<i>Carbamazepine 200 mg tablet</i>	Generic	Three	600 mg	\$19 \$
	<i>Carbamazepine 200 mg SR tablet⁴</i>	Carbatrol	Two	400 mg	\$133
	<i>Carbamazepine 200 mg SR tablet⁴</i>	Tegretol XR ⁵	Two	400 mg	\$79
CR BEST BUY	<i>Carbamazepine 200 mg SR tablet</i>	Generic	Two	400 mg	\$58
	<i>Divalproex 250 mg tablet</i>	Depakote	Three	750 mg	\$242
CR BEST BUY	<i>Divalproex 250 mg tablet</i>	Generic	Three	750 mg	\$108
	<i>Divalproex 250 mg SR tablet</i>	Depakote ER	One	250 mg	\$79
CR BEST BUY	<i>Divalproex 250 mg SR tablet</i>	Generic	One	250 mg	\$42
	<i>Gabapentin 100 mg capsule</i>	Neurontin	Three	300 mg	\$99
CR BEST BUY	<i>Gabapentin 100 mg tablet</i>	Generic	Three	300 mg	\$33 \$
	<i>Lamotrigine 100 mg tablet</i>	Lamictal	One	100 mg	\$212
CR BEST BUY	<i>Lamotrigine 100 mg tablet</i>	Generic	One	100 mg	\$106
	<i>Lamotrigine 200 mg tablet</i>	Lamictal	One	200 mg	\$255
CR BEST BUY	<i>Lamotrigine 200 mg tablet</i>	Generic	One	200 mg	\$122
	<i>Lamotrigine 25 mg dissolvable tablet</i>	Lamictal ODT	One	25 mg	\$186
	<i>Lamotrigine 50 mg dissolvable tablet</i>	Lamictal ODT	One	50 mg	\$200
	<i>Levetiracetam 250 mg tablet</i>	Keppra	Two	500 mg	\$327
	<i>Levetiracetam 250 mg tablet</i>	Generic	Two	500 mg	\$109
	<i>Oxycarbazepine 300 mg tablet</i>	Trileptal	Two	600 mg	\$287
	<i>Oxycarbazepine 300 mg tablet</i>	Generic	Two	600 mg	\$125
	<i>Pregabalin 100 mg capsule</i>	Lyrica	Three	300 mg	\$307
	<i>Phenytoin 100 mg ER capsule</i>	Dilantin	Three	300 mg	\$56
	<i>Phenytoin 100 mg ER capsule</i>	Generic	Three	300 mg	\$27
	<i>Tiagabine 4 mg tablet</i>	Gabitril	Three	12 mg	\$513
	<i>Topiramate 100 mg tablet</i>	Topamax	Two	200 mg	\$625
	<i>Topiramate 100 mg tablet</i>	Generic	Two	200 mg	\$303
	<i>Topiramate 25 mg capsule</i>	Topamax	Two	50 mg	\$315
	<i>Topiramate 25 mg capsule</i>	Generic	Two	50 mg	\$158
CR BEST BUY	<i>Valproic Acid 250 mg capsule</i>	Generic	Three	750 mg	\$41
	<i>Valproic Acid 250 mg delayed release capsule</i>	Stavzor	Three	750 mg	\$233
	<i>Zonisamide 25 mg capsule</i>	Zonegran	One	25 mg	\$37
	<i>Zonisamide 25 mg capsule</i>	Generic	One	25 mg	14 \$

* Selected doses. For the complete table, see our full anticonvulsant report at ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs.

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 2011. They are rounded to the nearest dollar. Information derived by *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* from data provided by Wolters Kluwer Pharma Solutions, which is not involved in our analysis or recommendations

4. SR=Sustained release

5. XR/ER=Extended release

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