

# ENDURING EPILEPSY DOMINIQUE'S STORY

Ever since she was a little girl, Dominique suffered from epilepsy. She couldn't even go to regular school because her seizures would happen so often, and the teachers were afraid it would scare the other students. After trying some other possible remedies that never worked for Dominique, her doctor prescribed her gabapentin with the hope she could get her seizures under control and have a normal life. As she began to gradually become adjusted to her medicine, her seizures became less severe and less common. Finally, she could go to real school with other kids!

Dominique was so excited to make new friends, but high school was different than she imagined. Many of the other students teased her when they found out she had been home-schooled. As she sat outside eating her lunch alone, a group of seniors walked by. Some were smoking and one girl even popped a pill in her mouth. Dominique recognized the motion because she had done it every day, three times a day, for years. As she took her own medication, the girl who had taken a pill noticed Dominique. "Girl, what're you taking? Anything good?" Dominique tried to explain it was just medicine for her epilepsy, and the senior took her bottle away from her. "Anticonvulsants are the best. They make you chill out and just feel super relaxed. You know it could work a lot better if you take two instead of one," the senior said. "I don't know about that; my doctor just told me to take them a specific way," Dominique responded. "But I guess I could give it a try," she said as she didn't want the only person who hadn't teased her to stop being nice to her.

Too high and loopy to return to class after lunch, Dominique was reported to the principal who called her mother to come pick her up. "You're lucky you can't get addicted to those things like other drugs," her mother exclaimed, "but I think you should come back to home-schooling if you can't learn to be responsible with your medications."

## TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. What is PHN?
  - a. A condition that can be treated with Gabapentin.
  - b. An abbreviation for postherpetic neuralgia.
  - c. Classified by burning, aching, or stabbing pain
  - d. A side effect of shingles
  - e. All of the above
2. Gabapentin is an opioid.
  - a. True
  - b. False
3. Which of the following is a side effect of gabapentin use?
  - a. Dizziness
  - b. Tremors
  - c. Anxiety
  - d. Suicidal thoughts
  - e. All of the above
4. Gabapentin should be taken with no more than 12 hours in between doses.
  - a. True
  - b. False
5. Because gabapentin has many of the same side effects as opioids, it's a controlled substance.
  - a. True
  - b. False

# GABAPENTIN



Answers: 1.E 2.B 3.E 4.A 5.B

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ACCESSIBLE FOR ABUSE

## WHAT IS GABAPENTIN?

Gabapentin is a drug that is classified as an anticonvulsant, which is a broad spectrum of drugs that can be used to treat diseases like epilepsy or bipolar disorder. Gabapentin is used to treat people who have seizures, but it does not cure them of their epilepsy; it only helps them manage their symptoms. Gabapentin can also be used to treat people who suffer from postherpetic neuralgia (PHN), which is the burning, aching, or stabbing pain that can be a result of getting the shingles. Restless Leg Syndrome (RLS) – a condition signaled by discomfort in legs when sitting or lying down, especially at night – can also be treated with Gabapentin, but doctors are not quite sure yet how it works to treat RLS. Funny how they can prescribe it to you without really understanding how it works, right?!

Gabapentin comes available as a capsule, tablet, or an oral solution, and it works to decrease abnormal excitement in the brain and changes the way the body senses pain. A mistake that many users make, unfortunately, is to quit taking the drug when they begin to feel well. Withdrawal symptoms may occur if you aren't gradually taken off of Gabapentin by your doctor. People often abuse the drug because it makes them feel the same as opioids can feel—sedated, pain-free, and even euphoric—without what they believe any consequences. This, however, is just not true. Although Gabapentin is not an opioid, the risk of overdose and death is still a very real possibility.



## INESCAPABLE SIDE EFFECTS

For some people, gabapentin, can be very helpful in treating symptoms for their disorders, but that doesn't protect them from experiencing many of the same side effects opioids. Gabapentin, whether you are prescribed it or not, can cause a very long list of side effects such as:

- Drowsiness
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Headaches/Migraines
- Uncontrollable tremors
- Double or blurred vision
- Anxiety
- Loss of memory
- Suicidal thoughts
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Increased appetite and weight gain

Even more serious side effects may include:

- Outbreak of a rash
- Itching
- Difficulty swallowing or breathing
- Swelling of the face, throat, lips, or eyes
- Increase in seizures
- Overdose and death



## WHO IS IT SAFE FOR?

When taken as directed by a doctor, gabapentin can be safe for people who have PHN or seizures, and there's even research to support it can be helpful for people who have numbness or tingling as a side effect of diabetes, and women who have suffered from breast cancer or are going through menopause can also benefit. It's even been studied to show usefulness in children as young as three and older adults. Researchers don't know, at this point, whether or not it is safe for pregnant or breastfeeding women to take gabapentin.

## AVAILABLE TO BE ABUSED

Many people who abuse opioids like prescription painkillers or pain-relieving supplements, particularly Kratom, also abuse gabapentin. In 2015, a study found that in rural Kentucky, where opioid use has reached epidemic proportions, 15% of people who misused gabapentin did so to get many of the same "high" feelings they could get from opioids. However, it's not currently illegal for someone who isn't prescribed gabapentin to be in possession of it since it isn't a controlled substance.

Like gabapentin, Kratom is not a controlled substance (yet!), so many teens experiment with both substances together for the ultimate high. Scientists still aren't totally sure of the mechanism, but it would appear that gabapentin highlights the effects of Kratom. That means while you may feel high and euphoric for a little while, you increase your chances for sedating yourself right into a coma.

