Pregabalin

Pregabalin is a medication derived from a group of medicines initially that were designed to treat epilepsy. Some of these you may have already tried such as Gabapentin, Phenytoin or Carbamazepine. These are called anti-convulsants. You may wonder why such drugs are being prescribed for treating your pain?

Epilepsy is a situation where a number of nerve endings within the brain have low threshold of response or are 'sensitized'. This means that a sudden stimulus such as a flashing light is enough to provoke a reaction from these nerves which is then spreads into its neighbours and can ultimately result in a seizure or 'fit'.

In a **similar** way, nerves supplying the area from which you are experiencing pain can be also sensitised. This can be small very apparent such as when a large nerve is damaged as part of the trauma of an accident. Sometimes it is less obvious as small nerves can be damaged by other medical problems such as Diabetes or poor circulation. In these circumstances minimal stimulus such as movement or light touch can provoke messages that are sent to the brain and hence you experience pain. It is often hard to understand, since we normally associate pain with something obvious like a damaged joint or torn muscle. But when the nerve itself is not working properly or damaged, the pain is just as 'real'.

Over the years, medications have been developed that whilst still anti-convulsant and therefore used to treat epilepsy, are far more frequently used to treat pain. Pregabalin is one such medication, which indeed is commonly used to treat pain, perhaps more frequently than for epilepsy.

This medication can induce good quality sleep. Unfortunately, during the day in a small number of patients it can produce sleepiness, dizziness, loss of balance and in the worse case scenario confusion. Clearly I would not prescribe this medication to you if these effects were guaranteed. Approximately 10-20% of patients will experience some kind of negative effect and some cannot tolerate the medication.

To try and avoid the side effects the dose is started very low. The starting dose is one 25mg tablet at night. The maximum dose is 300mg twice a day. I would like you to start by taking the single tablet at night to start with and if you sleep well during the night then there is no need to increase this dose further. If on waking in the morning you are free of side effects then you can take another single 25mg tablet in the morning. Once again, if you are pain free during the day there is no need to increase the dose further. We will discuss further measures at our next consultation. Naturally, if you do not sleep well then you need to sequentially increase the dose from one tablet to two, to three on sequential nights until one of the following things happen. Either you will ultimately find a dose that gives

you a good night's sleep without side effects or unfortunately you will discover that the medication is ineffectual and/or gives you side effects in the morning such as dizziness or a hung over feeling.

Similarly, during the day escalating the dose hopefully will find a level of medication that controls your symptoms, but if significant side effects supervene then this medication should be stopped and we will need to explore other options.

The maximum dose of Pregabalin is 300mg twice daily. This will equate to 12 x 25mg tablets twice daily. Naturally if you are finding that large dosages are required then a higher strength medication can be prescribed to keep the total tablet number to a minimum. The tablets are available in 50, 100, up to a 300mg tablet. If the medication is NOT successful, or only partially helpful, then other options will need to be discussed.

Other side effects occur much less commonly and include
1. Blurred vision
2. Swollen ankles

Special Points

1. If Pregabalin needs to be stopped, it is important to reduce the dose gradually over a few weeks, rather than stop suddenly.
2. If taking Pregabalin for epilepsy and/or pain always consult your doctor before reducing the dose.
3. **Always read the information leaflet provided with the medication.**