

Lacosamide: A New Drug for Seizures

Epilepsy is a brain disorder that causes people to have recurring seizures. Many medications can help prevent seizures, but few people become free of seizures with one drug. Most people with epilepsy need several medicines to control their seizures. That can cause problems since multiple drugs can be expensive, the drug schedules can be complex, many epilepsy drugs have annoying and potentially serious side effects, and most epilepsy drugs interact with one another. As a result, researchers are always looking for simple treatments with few side effects and few drug interactions.

A drug called lacosamide (Vimpat) was approved by the FDA in 2007. It blocks sodium from entering nerve cells in the brain. This prevents the cells from becoming activated, which may stop the spread of seizure activity. Lacosamide is approved by the FDA as an “add-on” drug—it is added to standard epilepsy medications such as phenytoin (Dilantin), carbamazepine (Tegretol), and valproate (Depakote). From a safety standpoint, lacosamide does not interact with these 3 drugs.



In clinical studies comparing lacosamide and an inactive placebo pill, the number of people who experienced a 50% reduction in seizure activity when lacosamide was added to their other medications was nearly double compared with those who took the inactive pill. When lacosamide is started, patients usually begin with 50 mg taken twice daily. The dose can be slowly increased until patients are taking 100 to 200 mg twice daily.

Lacosamide has also been evaluated for possible benefits in treating nerve pain that occurs as a complication of diabetes. While there may be a slight decrease in pain intensity with lacosamide, the analgesic effects do not seem very impressive. At the moment, there is not enough evidence to recommend the drug for this purpose.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Epilepsy Foundation
www.epilepsyfoundation.org/answerplace/faq.cfm

Medline Plus
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/epilepsy.html

National Institute of Neurologic Disorders and Stroke
www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/epilepsy/detail_epilepsy.htm

Based on “Lacosamide: An Adjunctive Agent for Partial-Onset Seizures and Potential Therapy for Neuropathic Pain” by Jacklyn A Harris and Julie A Murphy, *The Annals of Pharmacotherapy*, November 2009, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1345/aph.1M303>. For Our Patients is provided by *The Annals* to help explain the latest research and information relating to your medications. These summaries are for informational purposes only and are not a substitute for professional advice from your personal medical provider. If you have questions about this material, you should discuss it with your physician or pharmacist. This summary may be reproduced without permission for not-for-profit educational purposes only. Any other use must be approved by the publisher. © Copyright 2009, Harvey Whitney Books Company, hwbooks.com. FOPF19 DOI 10.1345/fop.1M303

Potentially serious side effects that have been observed with lacosamide include the possibility of liver dysfunction and changes in electrical activity in the heart that can be detected with electrocardiograms (ECGs). As a result, the drug should be used carefully in people with liver or heart disease. The drug also can cause dizziness, double vision, headache, and fainting. Like oth-

er antiepilepsy drugs, lacosamide can lead people to have suicidal thoughts.

Depending upon the dose needed, the monthly cost of lacosamide ranges between \$260 and \$475. Because of the expense, this medication is probably best suited to treat seizures in patients who cannot tolerate other medications.