PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Pentobarbital

This information from UpToDate® Lexidrug™ explains what you need to know about this medication, including what it's used for, how to take it, its side effects, and when to call your healthcare provider.

## Brand Names: US

Nembutal [DSC]

## What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat sleep problems.
- It is used to calm you before a procedure.
- It is used to treat seizures.
- It is used to put you to sleep for surgery.
- It may be given to you for other reasons. Talk with the doctor.

## What do I need to tell my doctor BEFORE I take this drug?

- If you are allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell your doctor about the allergy and what signs you had.
- If you have ever had porphyria.
- If you have liver disease.
- If you are taking griseofulvin.

This is not a list of all drugs or health problems that interact with this drug.

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of your drugs (prescription or OTC,

natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe for you to take this drug with all of your drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug without checking with your doctor.

## What are some things I need to know or do while I take this drug?

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Avoid driving and doing other tasks or actions that call for you to be alert until the effects of this drug wear off and you feel fully awake.
- Have your blood work checked if you are on this drug for a long time. Talk with your doctor.
- This drug may be habit-forming with long-term use.
- If you have been taking this drug on a regular basis and you stop it all of a sudden, you may have signs of withdrawal. Do not stop taking this drug all of a sudden without calling your doctor. Tell your doctor if you have any bad effects.
- Avoid drinking alcohol while taking this drug.
- Talk with your doctor before you use marijuana, other forms of cannabis, or prescription or OTC drugs that may slow your actions.
- If you are 65 or older, use this drug with care. You could have more side effects.
- Studies in young animals and children have shown that frequent or long-term use of anesthesia drugs or drugs used for sleep in children younger than 3 years of age may lead to long-term brain problems. This may also happen in unborn babies if the mother uses this drug during the third trimester of pregnancy. Talk with the doctor.
- Birth control pills and other hormone-based birth control may not work as well to prevent pregnancy. Use some other kind of birth control also like a condom when taking this drug.

- This drug may cause harm to the unborn baby if you take it while you are pregnant. If you are pregnant or you get pregnant while taking this drug, call your doctor right away.
- Long-term use of this drug during pregnancy may cause dependence in the unborn baby or newborn. Talk with the doctor.
- Tell your doctor if you are breast-feeding. You will need to talk about any risks to your baby.

## What are some side effects that I need to call my doctor about right away?

**WARNING/CAUTION:** Even though it may be rare, some people may have very bad and sometimes deadly side effects when taking a drug. Tell your doctor or get medical help right away if you have any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

### For all uses of this drug:

- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking; unusual hoarseness; or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat.
- Trouble breathing, slow breathing, or shallow breathing.
- Very bad dizziness or passing out.
- Feeling nervous and excitable.
- Feeling confused.
- Depression or other mood changes.

### Injection (if given in the muscle):

- Pain and irritation where this drug goes into the body.

### Injection (if given in the vein):

- This drug may cause tissue damage if the drug leaks from the vein. Tell your nurse if you have any redness, burning, pain, swelling, blisters, skin sores, or leaking of fluid where the drug is going into your body.

## What are some other side effects of this drug?

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother you or do not go away:

- Feeling sleepy.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, call your doctor. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-332-1088. You may also report side effects at https://www.fda.gov/medwatch.

## How is this drug best taken?

Use this drug as ordered by your doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

- It is given as an injection into a muscle or vein.

## What do I do if I miss a dose?

- This drug will be given on an as needed basis in a health care setting.

## How do I store and/or throw out this drug?

- This drug will be given in a hospital or doctor's office. You will not store it at home.

## General drug facts

- If your symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your doctor.
- Do not share your drugs with others and do not take anyone else's drugs.
- Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.
- Throw away unused or expired drugs. Do not flush down a toilet or pour down a drain unless you are told to do so. Check with your pharmacist if you have questions about the best way to throw out drugs. There may be drug take-back programs in your area.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. Check with your pharmacist. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- If you think there has been an overdose, call your poison control center or get medical care right away. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.

## Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer

This generalized information is a limited summary of diagnosis, treatment, and/or medication information. It is not meant to be comprehensive and should be used as a tool to help the user understand and/or assess potential diagnostic and treatment options. It does NOT include all information about conditions, treatments, medications, side effects, or risks that may apply to a specific patient. It is not intended to be medical advice or a substitute for the medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment of a health care provider based on the health care provider's examination and assessment of a patient's specific and unique circumstances. Patients must speak with a health care provider for complete information about their health, medical questions, and treatment options, including any risks or benefits regarding use of medications. This information

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## Last Reviewed Date

2024-02-27

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If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Pentobarbital - Last updated on December 12, 2022
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