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## **Extreme care needed with sodium valproate and pregnancy and women of childbearing potential**

Sodium valproate should not be used:

- In girls or women of childbearing potential unless other treatments are ineffective or not tolerated.<sup>1</sup>
- During pregnancy for the treatment of epilepsy unless there is no suitable alternative treatment.<sup>1</sup>
- During pregnancy for the treatment of bipolar disorder.<sup>1</sup>

As comparison, the risk of congenital malformations was highest with sodium valproate, with approximately 10–11% of pregnancies affected, followed by phenobarbital, phenytoin and carbamazepine.<sup>2</sup> There are no antiepileptic medicines risk-free when used during pregnancy.<sup>2</sup>

If pregnancy occurs, input from O&G, neurology and psychiatry is advised. A useful handout for clinicians is available.<sup>3</sup>

To prevent pregnancy two forms of effective contraception should be used by women who are taking an antiepileptic medicine; N.B. some hormonal contraceptives interact with enzyme-inducing antiepileptic medicines.<sup>2</sup>

References:

1. [Use of sodium valproate \(Epilim\) in girls and women – Change to indications and contraindications](#). Medsafe (2019)
2. [Balancing the benefits and risks of prescribing antiepileptic medicines in women](#). bpac<sup>nz</sup> (2018)

3. [Benefits and risks of taking antiepileptic medicine for females](#). ACC (reviewed 2019)

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