



*Gabapentin Capsules*

## PIC QUESTION OF THE WEEK: 10/12/09

Q: Are gabapentin or pregabalin useful in the treatment of pruritus?

A: Gabapentin (Neurontin® and others) is labeled for adjunctive treatment of partial seizures, neuropathic pain, and postherpetic neuralgia. A number of its off-label uses include tremors, hot flashes, spasticity associated with multiple sclerosis, and hiccups. Gabapentin and its analog pregabalin (Lyrica®) have recently been suggested as potential treatments for various types of pruritus. This common symptom may accompany several dermatologic and systemic diseases and is characterized by undesirable skin sensations that result in a continual urge to scratch. When severe, it can significantly affect the quality of life. Gabapentin has been beneficial in some types of pruritus, yet disappointing in others. A positive response has frequently been associated with its use in uremic pruritus, a condition related to the accumulation of urea and other nitrogenous substances. It occurs in up to 50% of patients receiving hemodialysis and is usually poorly responsive to antihistamines. Although the mechanism by which gabapentin provides improvement has not been established, it may interfere with the central sensitization process responsible for pruritus. In one study, a dose of 100 mg subsequently titrated up to 300 mg after dialysis significantly decreased the frequency and severity of pruritus at one month after therapy was instituted. A number of other reports also support the benefit of gabapentin in this form of pruritus. The drug has produced positive results in patients with brachioradial pruritus (a localized condition related to nerve root injury) and has also been shown to reduce the frequency and severity of pruritus associated with the intrathecal administration of morphine. In two case reports, gabapentin alleviated symptoms in patients with pruritus of unknown origin. Gabapentin has generally been ineffective in the management of cholestatic pruritus. In one trial, scratching actually increased in patients treated with gabapentin as compared to those receiving placebo. The most common adverse effects reported with gabapentin when used to treat pruritus include drowsiness, dizziness, and fatigue. Pregabalin has occasionally been beneficial in managing pruritus; however, most authors consider it inferior to gabapentin for treating this patient complaint. Gabapentin shows considerable promise for treating various forms of pruritus, especially the type noted in patients suffering from severe renal disease. Additional studies are necessary to determine the appropriate dose of gabapentin and the specific types of pruritus that are most responsive to treatment.

### References:

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