From Dr. Escudé...

Anti-Epileptic Drugs: Toxicities and Side Effects

Most medications have the potential for numerous side effects. With seizures being more common in people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), they are more likely to be on an anti-epileptic drug (AED). Besides the more commonly known side effects, AED’s can cause behavioral side effects. In people who have a limited ability to communicate with words and express negative effects of feelings associated with medications, behavior may be the primary form of communication. These behaviors may be mis-diagnosed as a mental condition for which the person may then be started on an additional medication to control, adding to the potential for adverse reactions.

Agitation, aggression, psychosis, behavioral disorders, hyperactivity, and restlessness are some AED-related behavioral side effects. Nearly all anticonvulsants cause some degree of cognitive, behavioral, or psychiatric adverse reactions*. Carefully evaluating a change in a person’s behavior when starting or increasing a medication can be quite helpful in identifying these negative effects.

Besides behavioral effects, AEDs can cause a number of other adverse reactions including the following:

- Bone loss
- Confusion
- Sedation
- Liver failure
- Neutropenia
- Pancytopenia
- Rash
- Stevens-Johnson Syndrome
- Gastrointestinal upset
- Eating changes

Osteoporosis
Osteoporosis may occur more frequently with carbamazepine, phenobarbital, phenytoin, oxcarbazepine, primidone, topiramate, and valproate. Consider calcium and vitamin D supplementation when using these drugs.
Folic Acid
Phenytoin, carbamazepine, phenobarbital and valproate can be associated with folic acid deficiency. Consider a higher dose folic acid supplement.


Thanks for your careful attention to helping improve the lives of people we support.

Craig Escudé, MD, FAAFP
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Dr. Escudé has dedicated his career to providing healthcare for people with IDD and other vulnerable populations and teaches on the subject throughout the country.