

Carbamazepine

Tegretol, Tegretol-XR, Carbatrol, Epitol, Equetro, a mood stabilizer that is also a seizure medicine

Carbamazepine steadies bipolar mania, and it also treats seizures and the sharp facial pain of trigeminal neuralgia.

WHAT IT TREATS

Bipolar mania, seizures

HOW YOU TAKE IT

Twice daily, with food

WHEN IT WORKS

Mania in 1-2 weeks

HABIT FORMING

No

⚠️ IMPORTANT SAFETY WARNING

Carbamazepine can cause a rare, life-threatening skin rash, and it can stop the marrow from making blood cells, so your blood counts are checked. If you have Asian ancestry, you need a gene blood test before the first dose.

① WHAT THIS MEDICINE DOES

- **Carbamazepine** quiets overactive nerve signals. That calms mania, prevents seizures, and blocks stabbing face pain.
- In bipolar disorder it is usually chosen when lithium or divalproex has not worked well or has been hard to tolerate.
- Before your first dose, people with Asian ancestry get a blood test for a gene that raises the risk of a dangerous rash.
- It is not a painkiller for everyday aches, and it is not a sedative. It is a daily medicine that works over weeks.

🕒 HOW TO TAKE IT

- Take it with food, twice a day, at the same hours. Food smooths out the dizziness and double vision people notice early.
- Swallow extended-release tablets whole. Some capsule forms can be opened onto food, so ask your pharmacist about yours.
- If you miss a dose, take it when you remember unless the next one is close. Never take two doses at the same time.
- Keep it in a dry place at room temperature. Damp bathrooms can ruin these tablets and make them work less well.
- Do not run out. Refill a week early, because even a few missed days can bring back seizures or mood symptoms.

📈 WHAT TO EXPECT

- Mania usually starts easing within **1 to 2 weeks**. Face pain often responds within days of reaching the right amount.
- Working looks like calmer sleep, steadier days, and fewer sudden swings between energy and irritability.
- Your body speeds up its own handling of this drug after about a month, so your dose often needs raising once.
- Expect blood tests for your counts, liver, and salt level at the start, at a few weeks, and then on a schedule.
- Early dizziness and blurry or double vision usually fade in a week or two as your body settles in.

♥️ COMMON SIDE EFFECTS

- Dizziness and unsteadiness are the most common. Move slowly at first, and raise the dose slowly if your prescriber agrees.
- Double or blurry vision usually passes. If it is bad enough to stop you driving, that is worth a call, not a wait.
- Nausea and stomach upset. Taking each dose in the middle of a meal solves it for most people within days.
- Sleepiness and a slow, foggy feeling. Shifting more of the day's amount to bedtime often clears the daytime haze.
- Low sodium can build quietly, bringing headache, tiredness, or confusion. Call if that happens; it is why salt gets checked.
- Mild dry mouth. Sip water and use sugar-free gum, and keep up dental visits so nothing sneaks up on you.

⚠️ CALL YOUR PRESCRIBER OR GET HELP RIGHT AWAY IF

- Any new rash means stop and call the same day. A rash with fever or mouth sores means go to the **ER**.
- Fever, sore throat, mouth ulcers, or easy bruising can mean low blood counts. Call your prescriber right away.
- Yellow eyes or skin, dark urine, or severe belly pain need a same-day call about your liver.
- If new thoughts of suicide or a sudden mood drop appear, call or text **988** and tell your prescriber.

🚫 WHAT TO AVOID

- This medicine causes **birth defects**, including spine and heart problems. If you can become pregnant, use reliable birth control.
- It also weakens the pill, the patch, and the ring, so add a second method and plan any pregnancy with your prescriber first.
- Skip grapefruit and grapefruit juice. They push your level up quickly, which brings dizziness and worse.
- Alcohol adds to dizziness and sleepiness, and it makes both seizures and mood swings harder to control.
- Tell every prescriber you take this. It lowers the strength of many medicines, including blood thinners and antibiotics.

⏸️ STOPPING IT SAFELY

- Do not stop suddenly. An abrupt stop can trigger seizures, even in people taking this medicine only for mood.
- Your prescriber will lower it over several weeks and may start something else before this one is fully gone.
- If a rash is the reason you stopped, tell every future prescriber. This medicine should usually never be restarted.
- If side effects are wearing you down, call before you quit. A slower schedule or a different form often fixes it.

❓ QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Do I need the gene blood test before I start this medicine?
- How will this change my birth control, and what should I add?
- How often will you check my blood counts, liver, and sodium?
- What exactly should I do if I wake up with a rash?

Where this information comes from

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NOTE

Sources are listed in APA 7th edition style. This handout is general information about a medicine, not medical advice, and it does not replace the instructions from your own prescriber or pharmacist. Never start, change, or stop a medicine on your own. If you think you are having a serious reaction, call your prescriber; if you cannot breathe, cannot stay awake, or are thinking of harming yourself, call 911 or 988 right away.