

Divalproex Sodium

Depakote, Depakote ER, Depakote Sprinkle, Depakene, Depacon, a mood stabilizer that is also a seizure medicine

Divalproex settles bipolar mania quickly, and it is also used to prevent seizures and migraine headaches.

WHAT IT TREATS

Bipolar mania, migraine

HOW YOU TAKE IT

Daily, with food

WHEN IT WORKS

Mania often in 1-2 weeks

HABIT FORMING

No

⚠️ IMPORTANT SAFETY WARNING

This medicine can cause serious liver damage; pancreatitis, a sudden swelling of the pancreas; and birth defects with lower IQ in babies exposed during pregnancy. It is not used in pregnancy unless nothing else will work.

① WHAT THIS MEDICINE DOES

- **Divalproex** calms the overactive brain signals behind mania, and it does the same job for seizures and migraine.
- It often works faster than other mood stabilizers, which is why it is a common choice during a manic episode.
- It is a strong option for mixed episodes, where high and low moods arrive together, and for rapid mood cycling.
- It is not a sedative and not a painkiller. For migraine it prevents attacks; it does nothing for a headache already underway.

🕒 HOW TO TAKE IT

- Take it with food. That single habit prevents most of the nausea and stomach upset people report in the first weeks.
- Swallow delayed-release and extended-release tablets whole. Crushing or chewing them can burn your mouth and throat.
- Sprinkle capsules can be opened onto a spoonful of applesauce or pudding. Swallow it right away without chewing.
- If you miss a dose, take it when you remember unless the next one is near. Do not take two doses together.
- Store it at room temperature and away from damp. Refill early, since running out for even a few days is risky.

📈 WHAT TO EXPECT

- Mania often begins easing within **1 to 2 weeks**. For migraine, expect **4 to 8 weeks** before you judge it.
- Working looks like sleep returning to normal, racing thoughts slowing, and other people saying you seem more settled.
- You will have blood tests for the drug level, your liver, and your blood counts, more often in the first six months.
- Some early nausea, sleepiness, and mild shakiness settle down within a few weeks as your body gets used to it.
- If you can become pregnant, expect a pregnancy test before you start and a talk about birth control at every visit.

💖 COMMON SIDE EFFECTS

- Nausea and indigestion are the most common. Taking it with meals and using the coated tablets fixes it for most people.
- Weight gain happens to about half of people. Setting up food and exercise habits in month one beats fighting it in year two.
- A shake in the hands, usually mild. It often improves if the amount is lowered, so mention it rather than hiding it.
- Hair thinning affects roughly **1 in 10** people. A zinc and selenium supplement helps, and hair usually grows back.
- Sleepiness and slowed thinking. Moving more of the day's amount to bedtime often clears the daytime fog completely.
- Irregular or missed periods can develop. Report changes, because this medicine can affect hormones in younger women.

⚠️ CALL YOUR PRESCRIBER OR GET HELP RIGHT AWAY IF

- Go to the **ER** for severe belly pain with vomiting, which can mean the pancreas is inflamed.
- Call the same day for yellow eyes or skin, dark urine, or new deep tiredness. These point to the liver.
- Unusual sleepiness, confusion, easy bruising, or nosebleeds all need a call to your prescriber right away.
- If new thoughts of suicide or a sudden dark shift in mood come, call or text **988** and tell your prescriber.

🚫 WHAT TO AVOID

- If you could become pregnant, use reliable birth control. Serious **birth defects** start in the first weeks, often before you know.
- Never plan a pregnancy without talking to your prescriber first. There are safer mood medicines to switch to beforehand.
- Alcohol adds to the sleepiness and is hard on the liver, which this medicine is already asking a lot of.
- Tell every prescriber you take this. It changes levels of lamotrigine, warfarin, and some antibiotics in a big way.
- Do not drive or use machines until you know how sleepy or unsteady this medicine leaves you feeling.

⏸️ STOPPING IT SAFELY

- Do not stop suddenly. If you take it for seizures, an abrupt stop can trigger a long and dangerous seizure.
- Stopping quickly in bipolar disorder often brings mania back within weeks, so any change is planned and gradual.
- Your prescriber will step the dose down over weeks and can start a different medicine before the old one is gone.
- If pregnancy is the reason you want to stop, call the same week. Do not stop first and ask afterward.

❓ QUESTIONS TO ASK

- If I could become pregnant, is there a safer medicine for me?
- How often will you check my liver, blood counts, and drug level?
- What early signs of a liver or pancreas problem should I watch for?
- Will this medicine change my birth control or my periods?

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.