

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS: ANTIPILEPTIC DRUGS AND SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

What is the difference between “suicidality” and “committing suicide”?

Suicidality or suicidal ideation is the thought that you want to kill yourself. Suicide is the actual act of trying to kill yourself.

Why does the FDA think AEDs are associated with suicidality?

The Federal Drug Administration (FDA) examined the rate of suicidality and suicide for people enrolled in 199 clinical trials of 11 new antiepileptic drugs. They found 0.43% (about 4 out of 1000 people) who had an experimental antiepileptic drug added to their existing antiepileptic drugs had suicidality and 4 had completed suicide out of more than 27,000 people. They found 0.22% (about 2 out of 1000 people) had suicidality and none had completed suicide among the more than 16,000 people who had placebo (a harmless sugar pill) added to their existing drugs. Since 0.43% is greater than 0.22%, they concluded that these drugs are associated with suicidality.

Do antiepileptic drugs really cause suicidality?

Many epilepsy physicians and professionals think it is extremely unlikely that antiepileptic drugs actually cause suicidality or that the risk is so small that it might not be very important. The findings that are known so far do not make sense to epilepsy doctors because all of the people in these studies were already taking antiepileptic drugs when they entered the studies; new drugs or placebo were just added to these drugs. However, you must be aware of the possibility of suicidality so you will call your doctor if you have thoughts of harming yourself. Learn more at: <http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org/epilepsyusa/news/FDA.cfm>

Will my antiepileptic drug cause me to kill myself?

It is extremely unlikely that your seizure medication will cause you to think about harming yourself. However, you and your loved ones must be aware that it is possible so you can detect and report concerns to your doctor.

How do I monitor for suicidality?

Call your doctor if you or your loved ones notice depression, talk of suicide or ending your life, giving away possessions, or have feelings of hopelessness.

What do I do if I or my loved one is suicidal?

Call your doctor if you or a loved one has any concern about you harming yourself. If there appears to be immediate danger to anyone, then call 911 or go to an emergency room. You will likely be referred to a psychiatrist, which is a medical doctor who specializes in these problems.

Where can I get help for this and similar problems?

Talk to your primary care doctor, your neurologist, or see a psychiatrist or psychologist. Virginia provides free psychiatric care at Mental Health Clinics administered by Community Service Boards. A list of them can be found at www.UVAepilepsy.com.