



Frequently Asked Questions About Drug Shortages

1) What is a drug shortage?

A drug shortage is when something happens that causes reduced availability of a medication and which could result in patients being unable to obtain a drug.

2) What is causing drug shortages?

Over the past 5 years there have been an increasing number of drug shortages in Canada. In many cases it is not clear why a drug has been unavailable. There appear to be multiple causes of drug shortages, some within Canada and some global, that have been resulting in shortages of medications.

3) What do drug shortages mean for people living with epilepsy?

Fortunately, many Canadians living with epilepsy have not been affected by a drug shortage. However, the true extent of the problem and the number of people who have been affected is not known. Each year since 2009, more and more people with epilepsy have been affected by drug shortages.

For most people with epilepsy, the primary treatment of their neurological disorder is anti-seizure medication. People with epilepsy need access to a consistent supply of their prescribed epilepsy medication(s) in order to prevent or control their seizures. If an anti-seizure medication is unavailable, or if there is not enough drug to meet the needs of patients, people who rely on that medication for seizure control are put at risk.

4) How will I know if I will be affected by a drug shortage?

The best source of information about the supply of your prescribed medication is your pharmacist. If you have any questions about the availability of your medication, or a medication that has been prescribed for one of your family members, speak to your pharmacist.

You can also visit a national website that has been setup for pharmaceutical companies to voluntarily provide advance notice of drug shortages: drugshortages.ca

If you see your drug posted on the above website, it does not necessarily mean that you will have a problem getting your prescription refilled. This will depend on the amount of medication that your pharmacist has in stock, the length of the drug shortage, and other factors. If you see your drug posted on the Canadian drug shortages website, contact your pharmacist for more information.

NOTE: The above website is a voluntary system and not all drug shortages are reported. In addition, the expected resupply date (ie when the drug will be available again) is the date that the manufacturer *expects* they will have stock available to ship out to their distributors. Typically, it takes several business days for medication to reach community pharmacies.

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5) Are there any precautions I can take?

Making a plan to fill prescriptions for anti-seizure medication several days before you run out is helpful. This provides some extra time to seek solutions if your anti-seizure drug becomes in short supply.

6) What should I do if my drug is not available?

If a shortage occurs and your pharmacist is not able to find a supply of the drug for you, contact your health care provider immediately.

Do not make any changes to your treatment plan without consulting with your health care provider. Continue to take the same amount of medication at the same time of day as usual. Your health care provider can discuss the situation with you and provide medical advice.

7) Where can I get additional information or support during a drug shortage?

You'll want to continue working with your pharmacist and your health care provider throughout a drug shortage to manage the situation and your epilepsy disorder in the safest, most effective way possible.

You can also contact your local epilepsy agency 1-866-EPILEPSY (1-866-374-5377) for additional information and support. Providing the following information can help your local agency assist you during a drug shortage:

Name of the drug: _____

Drug Identification Number or DIN (if known): _____

Do you have any medication remaining? _____

Have you contacted your health care provider? _____

What has been done so far? _____

8) What else can I do?

Subscribe to Epilepsy Ontario's email newsletter: *Voices of Epilepsy*

Our newsletter provides weekly stories as well as updates on key issues affecting people with epilepsy, such as drug shortages. Visit epilepsyontario.org to subscribe. You can submit your name and email address on the homepage where it says **Subscribe to our Newsletter**.

Contact your Member of Parliament and Member of Provincial Parliament:

If you are concerned about drug shortages and the serious consequences for people living with epilepsy contact your MP and MPP. Share your concerns with your elected representatives in Ottawa and Queen's Park and ask governments to develop effective solutions to anticipate, identify and manage drug shortages.