

# Nitrazepam

For the Treatment of Epilepsy in Children and Young People

## Traffic light classification – **AMBER 2** Information sheet for Primary Care Prescribers

Your patient has been identified as being suitable to receive nitrazepam in accordance with one of the indications detailed below. They have been started on treatment and have been reviewed to assess the efficacy and adverse effects of the treatment by the specialist team. Nitrazepam has been considered as appropriate for prescribing in primary care and the information contained in this document has been provided to support you to prescribe the medicine for your patient in the community. Your patient's dose is now stable and is detailed in the attached clinic letter. Your patient will remain under the care of the specialist team whilst receiving this medicine.

### Background

Nitrazepam has been used since the 1960s to treat patients with myoclonic epilepsies of infancy and childhood that do not respond to other anti-epileptics. Its use is generally restricted to the treatment of infantile spasms (a form of myoclonic epilepsy), typically when the spasms have been refractory to corticosteroids and vigabatrin. There is some evidence that nitrazepam may reduce spasm frequency.

### Indications

To be used to treat infantile spasm syndrome or Lennox Gastaut syndrome either as monotherapy or additional therapy in patients where first line or second line therapy in line with NICE guidance has failed.

This is an 'off-label' indication but is as per [NICE guidelines](#).

### Epilepsy and Infantile spasm:

**Dosing is based on guidance in the Evelina formulary (updated 2020).**

- Child up to 1 year: 250 to 500 micrograms/kg twice daily. Usual maximum dose of 2.5mg twice daily.
- Children 1 – 4 years: 2.5mg twice daily
- Children 5 – 12 years: 2.5mg – 5mg twice daily
- Children and young people over 12 years: 2.5mg – 15mg twice daily

### Available preparations

- Nitrazepam tablets 5mg (£1.75 for 28 tablets, Jan 2024). Tablets will be used as first line for all patients and can be crushed and dispersed if needed. This is an off-label use of a licensed medicine and there is local experience of crushing the tablets. The 5mg tablets are scored so smaller doses can be obtained. Advice on the use of tablets will be provided to the patient by the specialist team.
- Nitrazepam oral suspension 2.5mg in 5mL (£152 for 70ml, Jan 2024). This will only be initiated in exceptional circumstances and will be supplied by secondary care.

### Specialist Initiation

Treatment will be initiated by the specialist with a starting dose according to the dosage recommendations above and the dose titrated according to response.

The specialist will review the patient after treatment has started to ensure that nitrazepam offers therapeutic benefit. When the dose is stabilised, the GP will be requested to continue the prescribing of nitrazepam.

The GP is asked to contact the specialist with any concerns or side effects associated with nitrazepam.

The dose may be altered and optimised by the specialist clinical team; this change will be communicated via letter to the GP.

### **Monitoring recommendations**

No specific monitoring is necessary in primary care. Patients will be reviewed in the specialist clinic to establish clinical efficacy and any adverse effects associated with nitrazepam. If the treatment is not tolerated, treatment will be modified by the specialist clinical team. Any changes in treatment will be communicated clearly back to the GP in the clinic letter.

### **How long the medicine should be prescribed for**

Treatment with nitrazepam should be continued only whilst the specialist deems there to be benefit to the patient and the patient is not suffering undue adverse effects. The specialist will review the ongoing clinical need and benefit, but patients will be seen sooner if they experience adverse effects.

### **Contraindications**

Contraindications will be assessed by the specialist team. Please refer to the Summary of Product Characteristics ([SPC](#)) for the complete list.

### **Adverse effects**

The most common dose-dependent side effects include sedation, irritability. Chronic adverse effects include tachyphylaxis, behavioural changes, cognitive dysfunction.

Please note this list is not exhaustive – refer to [SPC](#) for complete list.

### **Interaction with other medicines**

- Cytochrome P450 inhibitors (e.g., cimetidine) may enhance nitrazepam effect.
- Cytochrome P450 inducers (e.g., rifampicin) may reduce the effects of nitrazepam.
- When used in conjunction with anti-epileptic drugs, side-effects and toxicity may be more evident, particularly with phenytoin or barbiturates or combinations including them. Dose will be adjusted, and side-effects will be monitored by the specialist team.

Please refer to [SPC](#) for full list of drug interactions.

### **Further advice**

In case of concerns or suspected adverse events, the paediatric neurology team can be contacted for advice.

The specialist should be notified of any lack of clinical efficacy or non-adherence with the treatment plan.

### **Contact details for advice**

Contact details of the specialist will be included in the letter requesting primary care to continue prescribing.

**Adapted with kind permission from Pan Mersey Area Prescribing Committee.**

**References**

1. British National Formulary for Children Electronic Version (accessed 01/12/2023)
2. Guys and Lewisham Paediatric Formulary 9th Edition
3. Evelina London Paediatric Formulary (formerly Guy's & St Thomas' Paediatric Formulary) – accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023 (last updated April 2020)
4. Medicines For Children 2003. RCPCH 2nd Edition
5. Management and prognosis of infantile spasms [www.uptodate.com](http://www.uptodate.com) (accessed on 10th May 2022)
6. Micromedex® 20 (electronic version). Truven health Analytics, Greenwood Village, Colorado, USA. Available at [www.micromedexsolutions.com](http://www.micromedexsolutions.com) Nitrazepam Pediatric Dosing (accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2023)
7. Iyer and Appleton. Improving outcomes in infantile spasm: role of pharmacotherapy. Pediatric Drugs 2016; 18: 357-366
8. Summary of product characteristics for nitrazepam 5mg tablets (Esteve Pharmaceuticals) [Nitrazepam tablets SPC](#) (accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023)
9. Summary of product characteristics for nitrazepam mixture 2.5mg/5mL oral suspension [Nitrazepam mixture PIL](#) (accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023)
10. Summary of product characteristics for nitrazepam mixture 2.5mg/5mL oral suspension BP (Rosemont Pharmaceuticals Ltd) [Nitrazepam mixture SPC](#) (accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023)