



IMPORTING BARBITURATES PENTOBARBITAL /NEMBUTAL

WHAT IS IT?

Pentobarbital is a short acting barbiturate which is commonly sold under several names including Nembutal and Sedalphorte. Phenobarbital has been used both in animals and humans as a sedative, hypnotic, anticonvulsant and anaesthetic drug. These drugs are available in both liquid and tablet form.

Recent media reports have stated that people have sought to illegally import Nembutal to assist in suicide. Some euthanasia groups have also advocated purchasing the drug overseas and encouraged travellers to conceal it from Customs and Border Protection on their return home. Be aware that importing barbiturates without permission is a serious offence and offenders will be referred to the Australian Federal Police.

WHAT ARE THE RESTRICTIONS?

Barbiturates are listed as a prohibited import under Item 18, Schedule 4 (Regulation 5) of the *Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations 1956*. Barbiturates are a group of medicines with many legitimate applications and there is a permission regime in place to allow for legitimate importations. Commercial importers need to be licensed and have written permission to import into Australia. Permits are issued to commercial importers through the Office of Chemical Safety and Environmental Health (OCSEH), within the Department of Health and Ageing.

Incoming passengers into Australia on a ship or aircraft carrying barbiturates for the purpose of treating a medical condition or treating a passenger who is in their care are able to carry a three month supply of medication, provided that the passenger has a prescription or a letter from their medical practitioner. Australian residents must carry a prescription from an Australian registered medical practitioner.

WHY ARE THESE RESTRICTIONS IN PLACE?

Barbiturates are classed as a Prescription Only Medication under the Standard for the Uniform Scheduling of Medicines and Poisons (SUSMP) and can only be used or supplied on the order of persons permitted by State or Territory legislation (medical practitioner) to prescribe and should be made available to patients on prescription only. **Use of Pentobarbital without medical supervision can potentially be dangerous to health, toxic or poisonous.**

HOW IS PERMISSION SOUGHT?

Licenses and permits are **not** granted to individuals for the purpose of obtaining medications for personal use, or to assist with suicide. If you are an individual wanting to access medications that are prohibited on import, you should consult your doctor. If you have a legitimate need for Pentobarbital, your doctor may be able to apply through the Special Access Scheme (SAS) administered by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). Once approval is granted by the TGA, the applicant (medical practitioner) will require a permit from OCSEH for clearance on importation.

PENALTIES

Barbiturates are listed as a border controlled drug under the *Criminal Code 1995* and their illegal importation may attract criminal sanctions. Penalties range from imprisonment and/or fines up to \$825,000.