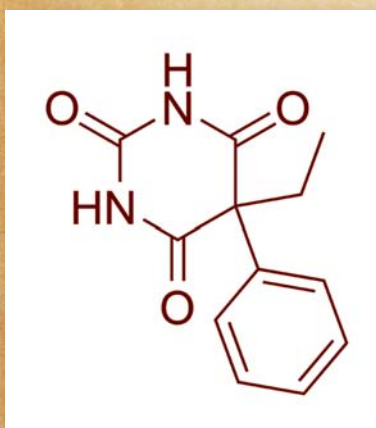


# Phenobarbital

The first major development in drug therapy of epilepsy after 1909 was of course the discovery of the antiepileptic effect of phenobarbital (Luminal). It was already in wide use as a sedative when, in mid-February 1912, Alfred Hauptmann, then a young clinical assistant in Freiburg, gave phenobarbital to his epilepsy patients as a tranquilizer and observed that their epileptic seizures were also suppressed. Whether apocryphal or not, the story is that Hauptmann was sleeping above the ward and was kept awake by the nocturnal epileptic attacks. He prescribed Luminal to make the patients sleep, and then noticed serendipitously that it abolished the noisy seizures.



His monumental article is an excellent example of prescient medical observation. He prescribed up to 300 mg per day, which was a lower dose than was used for night sedation (often up to 600 mg in Hauptmann's clinic) and presented case histories of amazing transformations in seizures, mental agility, and state of nutrition and strength. The drug was not rapidly taken up in international practice, partly perhaps because Hauptmann's paper appeared in a difficult-to-obtain German journal, but more obviously because of the outbreak of the 1914–18 war, which disrupted international medical communication and cooperation in the field of epilepsy.



Valerian – as advertised in *Epilepsia*, a commonly used sedative and alternative to phenobarbital