



Medication Overuse Headache

What is medication overuse headache?

If you take triptans or opioids on 10 or more days per month, or standard pain killers on 15 or more days per month there is a risk of developing an additional sort of headache called medication overuse headache.

Medication overuse headache can mean your headache problem ends up becoming even more difficult to control

It can mean that preventive treatments become less effective and that your headache condition becomes more difficult to treat

The problem of medication overuse headache is even worse if you take opioids for headache

It is therefore important to avoid this situation, or to tackle it if it occurs

How can I avoid medication overuse headache?

All medications used to treat an acute headache can result in medication overuse headaches.

Overuse of triptans or opioid medication has been shown to cause medication overuse headache faster and with fewer doses compared with standard non-opioid analgesics (eg paracetamol).

Remember to tell your doctor or nurse about both prescription pain killer medications and treatments taken over the counter as both can cause medication overuse headache

Specifically count up how many days in a month and how many tablets you take each day for treating headaches and preferably record this with a headache diary (we have one to download on the site)

One way to try and avoid medication overuse headache is to restrict your acute headache medications to no more than 2 days in a week

It can also be helpful to consider taking prescribed preventive treatments as these can be taken daily without the risk of medication overuse headache

If you do get medication overuse headache it is important to know that most people improve on withdrawal of the overused medication.