

Acute medicines for migraine

Acute medicines help to stop or reduce symptoms during a migraine attack. It's best to take them as soon as a migraine attack starts – or when a headache starts for migraine with aura.



Simple painkillers (analgesics)

These include ibuprofen, aspirin and paracetamol. Aspirin and ibuprofen are generally considered the most effective painkillers for migraine. But paracetamol can be a better option for children, if you're pregnant or breastfeeding, or if you have certain health conditions. Avoid painkillers that contain opioids, such as codeine, as they can be addictive.

You can buy simple painkillers from a shop or pharmacy without a prescription. But it's still important to check they are safe for you to take and the best dose to take for migraine. Read the patient information leaflet and check with your pharmacist or GP if you're not sure.



Anti-sickness medicines (anti-emetics)

Anti-sickness medicines for migraine include metoclopramide, prochlorperazine and domperidone. These medicines can help with any sickness you may get with migraine attacks. Anti-sickness medicines help your body to absorb painkillers, so they may also help these work better. Prochlorperazine can also help with symptoms such as vertigo and dizziness.

Some treatments designed for migraine include both a painkiller and an anti-sickness medication.

Anti-sickness medicines for migraine need to be prescribed by a GP or specialist.



Triptans

Triptans are another type of migraine medicine that can be used to ease symptoms. The most common triptan is sumatriptan. Others include almotriptan, eletriptan, frovatriptan, naratriptan, rizatriptan and zolmitriptan.

Your doctor may recommend you try a triptan if simple painkillers and anti-sickness treatments haven't helped. They may also prescribe a triptan in combination with these other medicines.

Most triptans are tablets that you swallow, but some are also available as wafers that melt on the tongue, nasal sprays and injections.



Gepants

Gepants are a type of medicine designed to help treat and prevent migraine. The only gepant currently available on the NHS in the UK as an acute treatment for migraine is called rimegepant (Vydura).

Gepants can be a good option for people who can't take triptans, don't tolerate them, or for whom triptans don't work. Your GP may be able to prescribe rimegepant for the acute treatment of migraine. But local guidelines may prevent this in some areas.



Medication overuse headache

Taking painkillers or triptans too often and for too long can lead to more frequent and more severe headaches. This is called medication overuse headache or rebound headache. Making sure you don't regularly take acute medicines on more than two days a week will reduce the risk of this happening. Talk to your GP if you need more advice.

We have more information on this topic. Just search for medication overuse headache on our website.



What to do if acute migraine medicines don't help

Talk to your GP if your migraine medicines aren't helping, you're regularly taking them on more than two days a week, or they're causing side effects.

Your doctor may be able to increase the dose of your medication or try a different one. Medicines work differently for different people, and it can take time to find one that suits you.

Other options that may also help include medical devices, supplements and acupuncture. Your doctor may also suggest preventive treatment. Preventive medicines for migraine aim to reduce the number of migraine attacks you get and how severe they are.

Find out more

You can read more about acute medicines, triptans and gepants on our website at:

- migrainetrust.org/acute-medicines
- migrainetrust.org/triptans
- migrainetrust.org/gepants

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Reviewed by: The Migraine Trust Information and Support Services Team and Reviewer Panel.

If you have feedback on our information, please get in touch at: feedback@migrainetrust.org

Contact our Helpline on **0808 802 0066** (Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm) or through our contact form and Live Chat service at migrainetrust.org/support. You can also email us at info@migrainetrust.org.



Patient Information Forum