



Headaches and Migraines

You have been given this leaflet because you have asked for headache or migraine treatment that you can get “over the counter” (OTC) from pharmacies, supermarkets and some other shops. After a local and national public consultation on OTC medicines, we do not prescribe short term headache or migraine treatment anymore. Although headaches can severely affect your life, they're rarely serious.

The most common **headache** is tension-type headache, which tends to be mild to moderately severe and affects both sides of the head. **Migraine** is a moderate or severe throbbing headache affecting one or both sides of the head and made worse by ordinary daily activities.

How can I avoid triggers/ suggested lifestyle changes

It may be possible to ease your symptoms and reduce the number of headaches, by making a few simple changes to your diet and lifestyle.

- **Regular exercise and relaxation** - helps reduce stress and tension
- **Diet and fluids** - Drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of fluid a day. Avoid alcohol and take regular meals
- **Migraine triggers** - Certain foods, stress, hunger, tiredness, menstrual changes or taking the combined oral contraceptive pill can trigger headaches. Try to avoid triggers if possible.
- **Headache diary** - you may wish to try keeping a headache diary and record how often you get headaches, how long they last, and whether they are mild, moderate or severe.

How do I treat?

Try lifestyle changes first, but if these don't work, you may wish to try treating with medication.

- **Pain killers**
 - **Paracetamol and Ibuprofen** are the most common drugs used to treat headaches and migraines. These can be bought from supermarkets, shops and pharmacies
 - **Stronger medication** can be bought from pharmacies specifically for migraines if required, your pharmacist can advise.
 - Avoid taking painkillers for headaches for more than 10 to 15 days per month as overuse of painkillers can cause headaches.
- **Other treatments** - Acupuncture can help with migraine and tension type headache.
- **Speak to your pharmacist** - if you're not sure which type of medicine is best for you and your symptoms.

When should I seek advice?

Seek medical advice if OTC treatments don't relieve your symptoms, or if you find it difficult to get on with your daily activities or go to work. Also speak to a health professional if you notice any of the following:

- **Frequency** - Your headaches become more and more frequent.
- **Additional symptoms** - You vomit for no apparent reason or have a high fever. You develop a stiff neck or feel drowsy. You suffer from persisting headaches after an injury to your head (though a mild headache for 1 to 2 days after a minor head injury is common).
- **Sleep** - Your headache prevents you from getting to sleep or wakes you.
- **Certain situations** - Your headache is worse on coughing, straining, bending, lying flat or laughing.
- **Speech and personality** - You notice a change in speech or personality.
- **Odd sensations** - You develop weakness, numbness or other odd sensations anywhere on your body, or you feel unsteady on your feet.
- **Severity** - You develop a sudden severe headache, like 'being hit with a hammer'.
- **Eyes** - Your eyes feel uncomfortable when looking at bright light, or you suffer sudden blind spots.
- **Other symptoms** - You have muscle pains, pain on chewing, a tender scalp, or feel unwell.

For more information

- Visit your local pharmacy for advice
- Migraine Trust - www.migrainetrust.org

Find out more about self-care at www.nhs.uk

Be self-care aware