



PATIENT INFORMATION

Triptan medicines

Triptans are a group (class) of medicines that are used to ease the symptoms of a migraine attack or [cluster headache](#).

They include sumatriptan, rizatriptan, zolmitriptan, frovatriptan, almotriptan, naratriptan and eletriptan.

They come as tablets (both to be swallowed and in dispersible form), as an injection and as nasal spray preparations. Preparations that are available in wafer or melt forms are for convenience only as they melt in the mouth and do not get absorbed quicker than tablets. You need a prescription for most triptans, but you can buy sumatriptan from pharmacies.

How do you take a triptan?

You should take the first dose when the headache (pain) is just beginning to develop, but **not** before this stage. That is, do not take it in the aura stage if you have an aura. Studies have shown that they do not work as well if taken too early. The exception to this is frovatriptan which has been used for prevention of migraines in patients with menstrual migraine. Triptans taken by mouth are designed to work rapidly - within an hour or so. Injected triptans usually work in 10-15 minutes.

After you have taken the first dose:

- If the triptan worked to relieve your headache but then the headache returned later, you can repeat the dose after 2-4 hours. Each triptan has a maximum daily dose that you should not exceed. This will be written on the packet.
- If the triptan did not work at all, a second dose is unlikely to work, so do not take a second dose. The exception to this is zolmitriptan (2.5 mg), where a second dose may be tried after two hours even if the first dose did not work. See the patient leaflet that comes in the medicine packet for details.

If a low dose does not work so well, you may be prescribed a larger dose. Also, some triptans work in some people and not in others. Therefore, if one triptan does not work, the same one at a higher dose, or a different one, may well do so. In some cases, some people have tried three or more different triptans before finding one that works best for them.

A migraine attack itself can often cause nausea and being sick (vomiting). This can cause problems in taking triptan tablets. Options to consider if this is a problem include:

- Sumatriptan as an injection.
- Rizatriptan which is available as a wafer that disperses in the mouth, and is then swallowed with saliva.
- Zolmitriptan and sumatriptan, which are available as a nasal spray.
- Also, taking an anti-sickness medicine such as prochlorperazine, domperidone or metoclopramide.

What are the main side effects?

A wide range of side effects are listed such as a warm-hot sensation, tingling, flushing, and feelings of tightness, heaviness or pressure in areas such as the face, throat, arms, legs and occasionally the chest. Some people feel a little unsteady or dizzy, developing a dry mouth, or feeling sick (nausea). If you have side effects from one triptan it does not mean that you will have it with other triptans. It is therefore worth trying alternatives if you have troublesome side effects with one or more triptans.

How many times a week can I take them?

If Triptans are taken too frequently there is a danger that they can cause overuse headache. If you are taking more than 2-3 Triptans a week then you should discuss further options with your GP or Specialist.

Are there any conditions where they shouldn't be taken?

Triptans should not be taken if you have a history of diseases of the arteries. This includes heart disease, stroke or uncontrolled blood pressure.

Pregnancy and breast-feeding

You should talk to your headache specialist about taking Triptans if you are pregnant, planning a pregnancy or breastfeeding. These medications are not licensed for use in pregnancy and breastfeeding but they are generally considered safe.