



Headache Wellness Center

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Medication Overuse Headache

Medication overuse headache (MOH) is one of the most common causes of migraine progression. Medication overuse is a condition in which the use of medications actually worsens headaches making them resistant to preventive treatments. According to recent information, each year over 9% of migraine sufferers will have a worsening in their headache disability. While MOH is not the only reason an individual may have migraine progression, it is clearly a major risk factor, and one that can be avoided.

Experts continue to debate which particular medications predispose patients to MOH. What is not debated, however, is that migraineurs have a more sensitive nervous system than people without migraine, and that frequent medication use for pain control, even non-headache pain control, may increase the risk for MOH in the migraineur.

We currently believe the following medications increase your risk for MOH:

- Opioids and narcotic medications
- Barbiturates and butalbital-containing medications, such as Fiorinal and Fioricet
- Combination medications such as Excedrin, Goody's or BC Powders, and Midrin.

Individuals who are already experiencing frequent headaches (≥ 10 per month) are at potential risk of headache progression when over-exposed to the following medications:

- Tripans, such as Imitrex, Maxalt, and Relpax
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)

Ultimately for many patients the primary focus for headache care is not on acute pain control, but rather on headache prevention. To this end, your provider will discuss with you various treatment options, including implementation of a headache-healthy lifestyle and the use of daily preventive medications.

It is important to remember that even the best treatments may not be effective if acute medications are overused