

Medication Overuse Headache

What Is Medication Overuse Headache?

Medication overuse headache is a secondary headache disorder that is caused by excessive use of acute medications. It affects 1 to 2 percent of the general population.

How does it work?

Overusing medications to treat headaches (exceeding label instructions or physician instructions) will put you into a vicious cycle of medication overuse headache or “rebound” headache. When you first take the medication, your body might feel relief. But once the pain relief wears off, your body will go into a state of withdrawal, signaling your body the desire to take more medication to relieve the pain. If you continue to take excessive amounts of medication to battle the pain, the cycle will continue until you begin suffering from chronic daily headaches. At this point, the headaches can intensify and become more frequent. MOH develops slowly over time and will continue to get worse until you receive appropriate treatment from your health care provider.

Why is this important?

Overusing your medication to treat headaches might help in the short term, but it will ultimately lead to a cycle of more frequent and more severe headaches. MOH also puts you at increased risk for other acute and preventive therapies to be ineffective. Taking more medication than prescribed will also lead to increased risk of getting side effects from the medication you are overtaking, potentially leading to additional medical complications.

How many times per week can I take my acute medication before I develop medication overuse headache?

Type	Common Name	Uses per Week
Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs	Aleve [®] , Motrin [®] , Toradol	3
Neuroleptics	Compazine [®] , Phenergan [™] , Reglan, Zofran	3
Triptans	Amerge [®] , Axert [®] , Frova [®] , Imitrex [®] , Maxalt [®] , Relpax [®] , Zomig [®]	2
Opioids	Dilaudid, Morphine, Norco, Oxycodone, Ultram	2
Barbiturates	Fioricet, Fiorinal	1



Spectrum Health complies with applicable Federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex.
[81 FR 31465, May 16, 2016; 81 FR 46613, July 18, 2016]

ATENCIÓN: Si usted habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al 1.844.359.1607 (TTY: 711).

إذا كنت تتحدث اللغة العربية، فيمكنك الحصول على المساعدة اللغوية المتاحة مجاناً. اتصل على الرقم 1.844.359.1607 (TTY: 711).