

Simple guidance for medication overuse headache

2% of the population will be suffering from headache due to analgesic overuse. This can occur with all analgesics in addition to Triptans. Codeine compounds are particularly implicated but paracetamol and NSAIs can cause problems. It occurs when these agents are taken on 3 or more days of the week.

It is useful to get an appreciation of the pre-existing headache type. Ask the patient to recall their history of when the headaches first started prior to excessive analgesic use. Amitriptyline (see patient information sheet) is a useful starting point. If migraine was the existing headache then a beta blocker or Topiramate can be used.

- If analgesia is essential for intermittent use then Naproxen is associated with fewer problems.
- Prednisolone (a milligram per kilogram up to a maximum of 60mg a day for 3 days and then reducing over a 3 week period) is a very useful adjunct for problematic cases.
- It is essential to identify the underlying headache problem and treat appropriately usually with preventative medication.