

How to Help your Migraine Patients

Tips for Pharmacists

QUESTIONS

When should a patient take an acute migraine treatment?



Can an NSAID and a triptan be taken together for the same migraine attack?

***Can triptans be combined with SSRIs?
The FDA issued a blackbox warning on this!***

ANSWERS

Ideally, the patient is able to recognize the first signs of an oncoming migraine. The acute migraine treatment, be it an NSAID or a triptan, should be taken as early as possible. Many patients have been advised to wait until the attack is moderate or severe before treating it, in order to avoid medication overuse. This is ill-advised because the attack will be harder to control.

In patients who have 8-10 or less migraine days per month, the risk of medication-overuse headache (MOH) is low. The migraine should be treated at its onset.

Patients who have 10 or more migraine days per month should be encouraged to avoid treating background headaches, or to treat them preferably with NSAIDs. True migraines should be treated as quickly as possible with a triptan, if one has been prescribed. A preventative treatment should be considered. A migraine diary is useful for keeping track of the situation.

Yes. Combining the two medications has provided superior results in cases where single-drug treatment was not effective. The two can be used consecutively or both at once. If the patient consistently has to take the second medication, the combined treatment should then be used at the onset of the migraine for further attacks.

The combination is not an absolute contra-indication. The risk of serotonin syndrome is low when an antidepressant and a triptan are taken at the usual dose. In cases where a patient takes a combination therapy or a higher dose, he/she should be referred to his/her doctor

For reference:

Evans RW, The FDA alert on serotonin syndrome with use of triptans combined with selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors or selective serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors: American Headache Society position paper. Headache. 2010;50(6):1089-99.

QUESTIONS

When should medication-overuse headache be suspected?



Should I recommend over-the-counter combined analgesics for migraine attacks?

Can a patient use more than one triptan for his attacks?

What is a migraine diary? Is it really useful?

Where can I refer my patients for information about migraines?

ANSWERS

The patient must have chronic headache (15 days or more per month for the last three months) and use an acute treatment (triptan, opioid, or barbiturate) 10 days or more per month. If only NSAIDs or acetaminophen are taken, then the definition of overuse is 15 days.

Narcotics and barbiturates are most strongly associated with medication-overuse headaches but they do not cause them in all migraine patients. It is important to remember that overuse is not necessarily the cause of chronification; it may also be the consequence. Even after medication withdrawal, approximately 40% of patients continue to suffer from chronic headaches.

NO. headache specialists generally avoid prescribing opioids, and it would be counterproductive for pharmacists to recommend over-the-counter (OTC) analgesics. The risk of medication overuse headache is high. The pharmacist can also help by monitoring and charting the delivery of OTC analgesics.

The ideal situation is to find ONE reliable triptan. But some migraine patients may use two different triptans, either for attacks of different severities (moderate = use oral, severe = use parenteral) or in a sequence (initial trial with oral then if pain is not controlled, parenteral rescue). Concerns regarding the taking of two different triptans within a 24-hour period are not scientifically founded.

A migraine diary is a basic tool for tracking migraines. It is used for noting migraine triggers, the effects of treatments, the frequency of attacks, and medication overuse. Encourage your patients to keep a migraine diary. It is very useful for self-management as well as for medical follow-up.

The website www.migrainecanada.org contains information for migraine patients. See the "Library" tab for information sheets in PDF format and the "Diaries" tab for migraine diaries in PDF format. Other reliable websites include <https://americanmigrainefoundation.org/>



The book of Dr. Elizabeth Leroux, "Migraine: More than a headache" is available in bookstores and ebook version. A french version is also available.

