

Information for adult patients using Amitriptyline in the prevention of headaches

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Neurology Services

The aim of this leaflet is to give you information about using Amitriptyline in the prevention of headache.

What is Amitriptyline?

Amitriptyline has been used in medical practice for over 30 years. Amitriptyline is used for a variety of conditions including depression, chronic pain, migraines and tension type headaches. The dose required for headaches is much smaller than that required for depression.

What are its side effects?

Some of the common side effects of Amitriptyline such as drowsiness and dry mouth improve with time. If you do get side effects you can step back down to a smaller dose for a week before attempting to gradually increase the dose again. If you get side effects with the 10mg dose, you can start with half of a tablet before building up slowly. You may be able to buy a useful tablet cutter from your pharmacist, alternatively very small doses when preferred, can be prescribed in liquid form. Alcohol consumption may make these side effects more pronounced.

It is sensible not to drive or operate machinery if side effects such as drowsiness occur.

You should avoid Amitriptyline if you have heart disease, epilepsy, severe liver disease or glaucoma.

How should I take it?

Amitriptyline should only be taken at night starting with a dose of 10mg. This should then be increased if necessary following discussion with your doctor by an extra 10mg every two or three weeks, until you achieve the dose which controls your headaches. Use the smallest dose which effectively controls your headaches ... this is often as low as 10mg or 20mg at night.

When should I stop it?

If there is a benefit, continue the drug for 6 months after which time it is reasonable to gradually reduce the dose then stop the drug.

* Although this medication is widely used by headache specialists and there is a large amount of experience with it, it should be noted that Amitriptyline is not licensed for use in headache.

* This leaflet is intended to provide a brief overview of aspects of this treatment protocol. It is not intended as a substitute for the comprehensive 'product information' leaflet found inside all boxes of medication. The 'product information' leaflet should always be read before taking medication.