

Information for adult patients using Beta-Blockers for migraine headaches

Developed and reviewed by Dr Anne Coker

Developed: 09/2011 Review: 09/2013 LN0601 

Neurology Services

The aim of this leaflet is to give you information about using Beta-Blockers for migraine attacks.

Background

Beta-blockers are widely used in a number of areas but particularly in cardiovascular medicine. Beta-blockers (Propranolol, Metoprolol or Nadolol) are also effective in the prevention of migraine.

Side effects

Beta-Blockers can cause fatigue and dizziness in some patients. They should not be used if you have asthma or obstructive airways disease and should be used with caution if you suffer from diabetes. Avoid use during pregnancy.

Propranolol can interact with another migraine drug Rizatriptan and if prescribed together the dose of Rizatriptan should be halved.

Taking the tablets

Recommended doses are:

- Propranolol in Migraine prevention, initially 10mg three times daily; maintenance 80 – 160 mg daily (as MR preparation).
- Metoprolol in Migraine prevention, initially 100mg daily; increase if required to 100mg twice daily.

- Nadolol in Migraine prevention, initially 40mg once daily, increased in 40mg increments at weekly intervals according to response; usual maintenance dose 80 – 160 mg once daily.

Start with the lowest dose. If your headaches resolve on this dose, there is no need to increase the dose any further.

If your headaches persist, then in conjunction with your doctor, consider a gradual increase in dose provided you are not troubled by side effects. Take the smallest effective dose that controls your headaches.

For how long should I take them?

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

*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.