



## Medication Overuse Headache

### Can Headache Medication Cause Headache?

Many medications that are intended to treat individual headaches – whether they are prescribed by a physician or available over the counter (OTC) – may actually *increase* the frequency of headache attacks when they are used too often.

Once the pattern of medication overuse headache (sometimes called rebound headache) is established, both the number of headaches and the amount of medicine needed to treat them can quickly spiral out of control. Typically, the effectiveness of the medication seems to decline. That leads to the use of more and larger doses of medicine and to the failure of other forms of headache treatment. The good news is that reducing or discontinuing the problem medication produces significant headache improvement for many patients.

### How Much Is Too Much?

The amount of medication required to produce chronic daily or frequent headache probably varies from person to person. For this reason, many experts recommend limiting the use of any acute headache medicine to no more than two days per week.

### Do You Have Medication Overuse Headache?

If you answer yes to the following, you may have medication overuse headache:

1. Are you using a medication to treat an individual headache three or more days per week on a regular basis?
2. Has the effectiveness of the medication steadily diminished even though you are taking more?
3. Do headaches wake you up in the early morning hours or do you regularly have a headache when you wake up?

### Steps That Can Help

- Track your medication use – both what you are taking and how often you are taking it – to avoid straying into overuse.
- Decide with your doctor how to treat acute headache episodes or headache intensifications and follow dosing recommendations. If you regularly feel the need to exceed the recommended amount of medication to treat individual headaches, talk to your doctor about ways to reduce your medication intake.
- Consider the use of headache preventive medication or other preventive treatment that may reduce the frequency or duration of headache attacks.
- Be patient. It may take weeks – or possibly months – to recover from the effects of medication overuse. However, when you *decrease* your use of the offending medications, you *increase* your chances of experiencing significant and lasting improvement of your headaches.