

Oxcarbazepine for headache and facial pain

Oxcarbazepine is a medication used to reduce pain of certain headache and facial pain conditions. It helps calm overactive pain nerves. This medication is licensed for other conditions, but not specifically for headache or facial pain. Sometimes a medicine is used “off-label”. This means it is not officially licensed for this condition, but there is good evidence that it is safe and effective. Oxcarbazepine is widely used by specialists and supported by clinical evidence.

Before starting oxcarbazepine:

Your prescriber will consider several factors before prescribing oxcarbazepine to make sure it’s safe and suitable for you.

Please tell your prescriber if you have:

- Bone marrow problems
- A blood disorder
- Epilepsy
- Mental health conditions
- Glaucoma
- Heart, liver, or kidney problems

Also tell your prescriber all the medications and supplements you take, including anything you have bought over-the-counter or online, as oxcarbazepine interacts with many different medications.

How to take oxcarbazepine:

You will usually start on a low dose of oxcarbazepine, which will be gradually increased. This helps your body adjust and reduces the chance of side effects.

The schedule below is a guide, but your prescriber may change it to suit your individual needs.

	Morning	Midday	Afternoon	Evening
For 7 days take:				300mg
For 7 days take:	300mg			300mg
For 7 days take:	300mg	300mg		300mg
For 7 days take:	300mg	300mg	300mg	300mg
Thereafter take:	300mg	300mg	300mg	600mg

Your prescriber may advise you to increase oxcarbazepine more quickly depending on your response.

This leaflet reflects a consensus of current clinical practice as agreed by the British Association for the Study of Headache (BASH) Council. It is intended to provide information to support clinical decision-making and does not constitute prescriptive guidance that must be followed in all cases. Clinicians should continue to exercise their own professional judgement and tailor management to the individual. The content reflects the collective experience of headache specialists across the UK, whose contributions are gratefully acknowledged, and recognises the ongoing evolution of best practice. This leaflet should be read in conjunction with the Summary of Product Characteristics and the patient information leaflet provided with all medication.

How long to take oxcarbazepine:

You should continue to increase oxcarbazepine as per the regime above until your pain or headache attacks resolve or you are unable to tolerate the side effects. Ideally, you should take oxcarbazepine for at least 3 months before deciding if it's helping.

If you experience mild side effects these will likely improve the longer you take the medication. If you experience side effects that are difficult to manage, contact your prescriber to discuss your dose.

Do not stop taking oxcarbazepine suddenly, as your pain may return or worsen and you may feel unwell. Speak to your prescriber about how to reduce the dose safely.

Your prescriber or GP will review your treatment regularly. If it is working well, your prescriber may advise gradually reducing the dose, typically after about 12 months.

Blood tests:

Your prescriber or GP will arrange a routine blood test to check your kidney function and blood count while you are increasing the oxcarbazepine and then less frequently once you are on a stable dose.

Possible side effects of oxcarbazepine:

Some people get side effects. These usually get better as your body gets used to the medication.

Please read the information leaflet that comes with your medication for more details. This is not a full list of side effects, but the most common ones are:

- feeling sick (nausea) or vomiting
- feeling weak, tired, or dizzy
- headache
- double vision
- dry mouth
- weight gain

If you feel tired or dizzy, do not drive, ride a bike, or use tools or machinery.

Oxcarbazepine can very rarely cause serious skin reactions that require urgent hospital treatment. You should contact urgent care (NHS 111) or your GP if any of the following symptoms occur:

- A widespread red or purple rash
- Blisters or skin peeling
- Sores in your mouth, eyes, or genital area
- Flu-like symptoms such as fever, headache, or cough

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Pregnancy and breastfeeding:

Oxcarbazepine is not safe in pregnancy or breastfeeding

- Do not take it if you are pregnant or trying for a baby
- Always tell your prescriber if you think you might be pregnant
- Speak to your GP for advice about safe contraception and pregnancy planning

For more information, see: Best Use of Medicine in Pregnancy (BUMPS)

<https://www.medicinesinpregnancy.org/>

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