

Propranolol for headache

Propranolol is a medication called a beta-blocker. It is used to help headaches, in particular migraine.

Before starting propranolol:

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

Please tell your prescriber if you have:

- Chest pain
- Heart, kidney or liver problems
- Diabetes
- Psoriasis
- An overactive thyroid (thyrotoxicosis)
- Asthma
- Raynaud's phenomenon
- Depression (past or present)

How to take propranolol:

You will usually start on a low dose of propranolol, 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	Evening
For 1 week take:	10mg	10mg
For 1 week take:	20mg	20mg
For 4 weeks take:	40mg	40mg
<i>If partially effective and well tolerated you can continue to increase the dose, if not remain on the dose above:</i>		
For 4 weeks take:	60mg	60mg
Thereafter take:	80mg	80mg

Response to medication is individual, although many people find 80-160mg a day helpful.

The maximum dose is 240mg per day.

Once you are stable on a dose, your prescriber may suggest switching to a long-acting (Modified Release) version.

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 propranolol:

If you are tolerating propranolol well, it is advisable to reach a dose of 80mg a day. Ideally, you should take propranolol at this dose (or higher, if prescribed) for at least 3 months before deciding if it's helping.

Do not stop taking propranolol 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.

Possible side effects of propranolol:

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 tired
- feeling dizzy or light-headed
- a reduced resting heart rate
- vivid dreams or difficulty sleeping
- mood changes
- erectile dysfunction
- feeling sick (nausea), diarrhoea, or constipation
- cold hands or feet
- weight gain

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

Pregnancy and breastfeeding:

Propranolol can sometimes be used in pregnancy or while breastfeeding, but only in the lowest dose that helps. Your prescriber will talk to you about the benefits and the risks.

Always tell your prescriber if you are trying for a baby or think you might be pregnant.

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

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

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