**Propranolol for Headaches – information for GPs**

Please print and share this information with the patient.

Propranolol is a beta blocker - it blocks part of the adrenaline response. It is used in a variety of conditions including high blood pressure and fast heart rhythms.

**Instructions for starting**

Start at 40mg once daily then increase by 40mg every week until on 40mg three times a day (120mg total).

At this dose, keep taking the Propranolol for a minimum of 8 weeks, keeping a headache diary to assess if there is any benefit.

If there is no benefit, further increases can be made in 40mg steps every week until on 80mg three times a day (240mg total).

A long acting (MR) preparation may be preferable as it only needs to be taken once a day. However, some report that the short acting preparation works better in migraine.

**Common contraindications\***

* It should be avoided in patients with asthma or other obstructive airways disease.
* Do not use with Verapamil

**Most common side effects\***

* Lethargy and poor exercise intolerance, resulting in weight gain
* Symptoms of low blood pressure (dizziness, fainting)
* Sexual dysfunction including impotence (note - this is reversible)
* Nightmares
* Cold hands and feet

**Pregnancy**

Avoid if there is a risk of pregnancy as it may cause intra-uterine growth restriction, neonatal hypoglycaemia, and bradycardia

**\*Full list of contraindications, cautions and side effects according to the BNF:**

**Contra-indications**

Asthma; cardiogenic shock; hypotension; marked bradycardia; metabolic acidosis; phaeochromocytoma (apart from specific use with alpha-blockers); Prinzmetal’s angina; second-degree AV block; severe peripheral arterial disease; sick sinus syndrome; third-degree AV block; uncontrolled heart failure, do not use with Verapamil

**Cautions**

Diabetes; first-degree AV block; history of obstructive airways disease (introduce cautiously); myasthenia gravis; portal hypertension (risk of deterioration in liver function); psoriasis; symptoms of hypoglycaemia may be masked; symptoms of thyrotoxicosis may be masked

**Common or very common side effects**

Abdominal discomfort; bradycardia; confusion; depression; diarrhoea; dizziness; dry eye (reversible on discontinuation); dyspnoea; erectile dysfunction; fatigue; headache; heart failure; nausea; paraesthesia; peripheral coldness; peripheral vascular disease; rash (reversible on discontinuation); sleep disorders; syncope; visual impairment; vomiting

**Uncommon side effects**

Atrioventricular block; bronchospasm

**Rare or very rare side effects**

Hallucination, Alopecia; memory loss; mood altered; neuromuscular dysfunction; postural hypotension; psychosis; skin reactions; thrombocytopenia