**Amitriptyline for Headaches – information for GPs**

Please print and share this information with the patient.

This was originally used mainly as an antidepressant, but is mostly used now for its pain relieving properties. It is used for treating neuropathic pain and abdominal pain as well as headaches.

It is usually taken at bed time as it can cause drowsiness, and it may therefore be helpful in those who find it difficult to sleep.

**Instructions for starting**

Take 10mg at night. It can be increased in 10mg steps every few days to a maximum of 75 mgs at night. If it causes excessive drowsiness reduce by 10mg, back down to the last tolerable dose.

Stay on this dose for a minimum of 8 weeks, keeping a headache diary to assess if there is any benefit.

**Most important side effects\*:**

* Drowsiness
* Dizziness or feeling faint
* Dry mouth
* Difficulty passing urine

Note: patients are encouraged to persist with treatment as some tolerance to these side effects seems to develop. The chance of side effects is reduced if one starts at a low dose and increases gradually.

**Additional note regarding possible dementia link**

Recent research has suggested a link between taking Amitriptyline for a prolonged period of time (e.g. over 3 years) and developing dementia in later life. It is unclear whether the Amitriptyline causes dementia but we suggest that its use is reviewed at least annually, and that the patient is aware of this possible link.

**\*Full list of side effects according to the BNF:**

**Common or very common**

Anticholinergic syndrome; drowsiness; QT interval prolongation

**Frequency not known**

Agranulocytosis; alopecia; anxiety; appetite abnormal; arrhythmias; asthenia; bone marrow depression; breast enlargement; cardiac conduction disorders; coma; concentration impaired; confusion; constipation; delirium; delusions; diarrhoea; dizziness; dry mouth; dysarthria; eosinophilia; epigastric distress; face oedema; galactorrhoea; gynaecomastia; hallucination; headache; hepatic disorders; hyperhidrosis; hyperpyrexia; hypertension; hyponatraemia; hypotension; leucopenia; mood altered; movement disorders; mydriasis; myocardial infarction; nausea; neuroleptic malignant syndrome; oral disorders; palpitations; paralytic ileus; peripheral neuropathy; photosensitivity reaction; seizure; sensation abnormal; sexual dysfunction; SIADH; skin reactions; sleep disorders; stroke; sudden cardiac death; suicidal tendencies; syncope; taste altered; testicular swelling; thrombocytopenia; tinnitus; tremor; urinary disorders; urinary tract dilation; vision disorders; vomiting; weight changes; withdrawal syndrome