

BE AWARE OF OTC SUMATRIPTAN USE BY PEOPLE WITH MIGRAINE

Sumatriptan 50 mg is now available for sale as a pharmacist only medicine.

Pharmacists have been given strict criteria concerning over the counter sales.

The purchaser must have an established pattern of migraine symptoms and the product can only be sold in an original pack of two tablets along with an information leaflet.

In those with a definitive diagnosis of migraine, sumatriptan is often an effective treatment. It works best when taken early in the painful phase of a migraine headache and unlike simple analgesics, is less effective when taken during the aura.

There is a significant risk of relapse with sumatriptan (within 48 hours) in up to 50% of patients. The dose can be repeated but is usually less effective the second time. Use of sumatriptan or analgesics on more than two days per week is associated with significant risk of medication overuse headache. Establishing a clear history regarding previous use is essential.

In general, it is recommended that all patients presenting with headache are questioned about their non-prescription analgesic use. Many people will have tried over the counter NSAIDs or paracetamol (and now perhaps sumatriptan) prior to a consultation. A history of self management is often useful in determining the type of headache and the treatment options.

For more information about sumatriptan and the treatment of migraine see BPJ 7.