

Working to relieve the pressure!

There is currently no 'cure' for idiopathic intracranial hypertension (IIH), but some medications can help to lower intracranial pressure and relieve some of the symptoms of IIH. There are two main types of medication that are prescribed - **diuretics** and **analgesics**. Diuretics reduce fluid in the body by increasing the excretion of water and mineral salts via the kidneys, increasing urine production. They are also sometimes called 'water tablets'. Analgesics are drugs that relieve pain. There are different classes of analgesics that are used to treat differing types, causes and severities of pain.

Acetazolamide (Diamox)

Is the most commonly prescribed medication. It is a carbonic anhydrase inhibitor used for glaucoma, some types of epilepsy and fluid retention. Acetazolamide can reduce CSF production in most patients and can be taken in a slow release form called Diamox SR.

Nearly all patients will experience side effects such as tingling of the fingers and toes, and a metallic taste when drinking carbonated drinks.

Patients who are prescribed Acetazolamide must be monitored closely by their Doctor and have regular blood tests to check their electrolytes levels.

Acetazolamide can deplete the body's stores of potassium. If potassium levels become very low it may be necessary to take potassium supplements. Eating potassium rich foods such as, baked potatoes, tomato products, raisins, dried apricots bananas can help increase potassium levels. Taking medication with food can help with some of the side effects experienced.

For more information on Acetazolamide –

<http://www.patient.co.uk/medicine/Acetazolamide.htm>

Topiramate (Topamax®)

Originally used as a weight loss medication, Topiramate is used as an anti-seizure medication and can reduce the production of CSF. At this time there have been no studies to show that it works any more efficiently than Acetazolamide. Again side effects are common and can be severe in some cases. If you experience any side effects from taking medications ensure that you tell your Doctor.

For information on Topiramate and its side effects -

<http://www.patient.co.uk/medicine/Topiramate.htm>

Diuretics

A side effect all diuretics share is an increased need to pass water, but this doesn't mean you should drink less. It is important that everyone, not just people on diuretics, drinks plenty of water every day to prevent dehydration and help the body flush away toxins.

Diuretics that may be prescribed include **Furosemide® (Frusol®, Lasix®, Duimide®, Frumil®)** and **Bendrofluazide**. Sometimes more than one diuretic may be used in combination to achieve the desired effect and minimise side effects.

For more information on diuretics and the tests you should have when taking them, please see:

<http://www.patient.co.uk/health/Diuretics-Loop.htm>

and [http://www.patient.co.uk/health/Diuretics-](http://www.patient.co.uk/health/Diuretics-Thiazides.htm)

[Thiazides.htm](http://www.patient.co.uk/health/Diuretics-Thiazides.htm)

Analgesics

Analgesics are pain relieving medications. There are two main classes of analgesics, opioid and non-opioid analgesics.

Opioids (or opiates) are powerful drugs that act on the central nervous system and alter perception of pain. Opioids drugs have many possible side effects, including addiction. Opiate drugs also have a tendency to make you feel drowsy, though there are other potentially serious side effects which make doctors wary of prescribing opiates unnecessarily.

Some prescribed opiate based pain killers include: **Tramadol, Fentanyl, and Morphine**.

Read more about these medications here -

<http://www.patient.co.uk/doctor/Opioid-Analgesics.htm>

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Non-opioid

Analgesics that have no tendency to produce dependence, but they can have side effects. They are sometimes referred to as weak analgesics. This class also includes NSAIDs - non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. Non-opioids are often used in combination with other analgesics, e.g. paracetamol with codeine.

Some non-opioid drugs are available over the counter, for example, paracetamol and ibuprofen.

When taking over the counter medications always read the information leaflet for dosing instructions and check if the product contains caffeine. Large amounts of caffeine can raise intracranial pressure. It is also very important that you tell your doctor which medication you are taking and how often, as this may affect some of the other prescribed medications you take.

Read more about painkillers here -

<http://www.patient.co.uk/health/Painkillers.htm>

Medium strength analgesics for moderate to severe pain

If over the counter medications aren't effective, your doctor may consider prescribing stronger analgesics. These prescriptions generally combine weak opioids with mild analgesics. Rarely, stronger analgesics may be given, but opioid drugs have severe side effects, can cause extreme drowsiness, and produce dependence. Some drugs are not recommended because they can produce "rebound" headaches, i.e. when you don't take them, their withdrawal effects cause a headache, so you take more, and the cycle is repeated.

Other types of medication

As well as diuretics and analgesics there are other types of medication which are sometimes prescribed for IIH. These can be used in combination with analgesics, or to treat severe symptoms of IIH.

Antidepressants and relaxants

In low doses can help to relax you, for example so that you don't get a tension headache as well as a high pressure headache. Some of these type of drugs include **Amitriptyline**, **Imipramine (Tofranil)**, and **Diazepam**. Because diazepam is highly addictive it is only used for short spells for acute, very severe, symptoms.

Anti-seizure

Drugs may also be used to treat neuropathic (nerve) pain, for example **Gabapentin (Neurontin®)**.
<http://www.patient.co.uk/medicine/Gabapentin.htm>

Corticosteroids like **Dexamethasone** and **Betamethasone** are also sometimes used to treat neuropathic (nerve) pain from nerve compression from raised intracranial pressure. Because corticosteroids are very powerful drugs that can have some serious side effects at high dosages, especially when used for extended length of time, they are only used for short periods and at relatively low doses under close supervision.

Anti-emetics

Are drugs that reduce feelings of nausea and vomiting. Some of the drugs that doctors may prescribe for severe symptoms are **Prochlorperazine (Stemetil®, Buccastem®)**, **Domperidone (Motilium®)**, and **Betahistine (Serc®)**.

For more information on these medications please see -<http://www.patient.co.uk/doctor/The-Treatment-of-Nausea-and-Vertigo.htm>

This list is not exclusive, but by the same token there may be medical reasons why your doctor will not prescribe some of the medications listed. Many have side effects and can interact with other medications you may take.

There are some medications that you should not take if you have been diagnosed with IIH and again your doctor or pharmacist should be able to advise you. IIH UK are working to build a list of medications that should be avoided and hope to improve patient leaflets in medications prescribed to include information for IIH sufferers.