

Triptans for Migraine Headaches: What You Should Know

What are triptans?

Triptans are prescription drugs used to treat migraines—a kind of severe, painful headache. Triptans can work well to reduce migraine pain. They give relief within two hours for most people. Triptans can also relieve other symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and sensitivity to light and noise. They do not prevent migraines.

Triptans work for some kinds of migraines. If you have bad headaches, talk to your doctor and get an exam. Ask if triptans are a good choice for you.

Try other treatments first.

Try these treatments first. If they do not help, ask your doctor about triptans.

- Acetaminophen, aspirin, ibuprofen, or naproxen
- Combination products that have acetaminophen, aspirin, and caffeine
- Nondrug treatments, such as relaxation training

Some people should not take triptans.

Triptans narrow the blood vessels. Therefore, do not take a triptan if you have or have ever had:

- Heart disease, angina, or a heart attack
- A stroke or mini-stroke (TIA)
- Peripheral vascular disease
- Uncontrolled high blood pressure
- Certain rare migraines (hemiplegic, basilar, aura)

Doctors should avoid or cautiously prescribe triptans:

- For men over 40 and women over 55.
- For people with risks for heart disease, such as smoking, diabetes, obesity, and high cholesterol.
- For people with a family history of early heart disease or stroke.
- For pregnant or menopausal women.

Ask your doctor about drug interactions.

Your doctor should carefully check all the drugs you take. If you take triptans, it can be dangerous to take certain other drugs, including some other migraine drugs and many antidepressants.

Triptans can cause side effects.

All triptans can cause unpleasant side effects. Usually they are mild and get better over time. The most common are dizziness, numbness, tingling, flushing, sleepiness, and tiredness. Severe side effects are rare.

For many people, the most worrisome side effect is chest tightness, pain, or pressure. Up to seven out of 100 people have these “triptan sensations.” If you have these, call your doctor right away, just to be safe.

Triptans can be costly.

A single dose costs from \$12 to \$46 per pill. Nasal sprays and injectables (shots) cost more. Insurance may cover only one or two doses a month.


The generics cost less than half as much as the brand-name pills.

Our advice:

We compared the cost and safety of different triptans, and how well they relieved pain. We chose the following as our *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drug*:

Sumatriptan

You can get sumatriptan as a generic, in pills, nasal sprays, and injectable forms. The injectable can work for people with sudden migraines, who cannot take a pill because of vomiting.






Triptans are taken at the first sign of a migraine.

Triptans: Drug Comparison Chart*

Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs are in blue. We recommend these drugs because they work as well and are as safe as the other drugs, and they cost less.

Our analysis is based on a scientific review by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. This is a summary of a longer, more detailed report you can find at www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org.

Best Buy	Generic Name & Strength	Brand Name ^A	Maximum Allowed Dose/24 Hours	Price per Dose ^B	Average Cost per Month ^B 2 migraines/month, taking 1 dose per attack	Average Cost per Month ^B 2 migraines/month, taking maximum allowed dose/attack, over 24 hours
	Almotriptan 6.25 mg tablet	Axert	25 mg	\$34	\$67	\$269
	Eletriptan 20 mg tablet	Relpax	80 mg	\$38	\$76	\$303
	Frovatriptan 2.5 mg tablet	Frova	7.5 mg	\$42	\$83	\$249
	Naratriptan 2.5 mg tablet	Generic	5 mg	\$12	\$23	\$47
	Naratriptan 2.5 mg tablet	Amerge	5 mg	\$40	\$80	\$160
	Rizatriptan 5 mg tablet	Maxalt	30 mg	\$39	\$77	\$464
	Rizatriptan 5 mg dissolvable tablet	Maxalt MLT	30 mg	\$39	\$79	\$473
	Sumatriptan 5 mg nasal spray	Generic	40 mg	\$38	\$76	\$610
	Sumatriptan 5 mg nasal spray	Imitrex	40 mg	\$50	\$101	\$805
	Sumatriptan 20 mg nasal spray	Generic	40 mg	\$38	\$76	\$153
	Sumatriptan 20 mg nasal spray	Imitrex	40 mg	\$48	\$95	\$191
	Sumatriptan 6 mg/0.5 mL cartridge injectable	Generic	12 mg	\$47	\$94	\$188
	Sumatriptan 6 mg / 0.5 mL cartridge injectable	Imitrex	12 mg	\$120	\$240	\$479
	Sumatriptan 4 mg/0.5 mL pen injectable	Generic	12 mg	\$49	\$97	\$291
	Sumatriptan 6 mg / 0.5 mL pen injectable	Imitrex	12 mg	\$66	\$133	\$266
	Sumatriptan 6 mg / 0.5 mL needleless injectable	Sumavel dosePro	12 mg	\$65	\$130	\$260
	Sumatriptan 6 mg/0.5 mL vials injectable	Generic	12 mg	\$39	\$78	\$156
	Zolmitriptan 2.5 mg tablet	Zomig	10 mg	\$41	\$81	\$326
	Zolmitriptan 2.5 mg dissolvable tablet	Zomig ZMT	10 mg	\$39	\$77	\$309
	Zolmitriptan 5 mg nasal spray	Zomig	10 mg	\$48	\$96	\$192

* Due to space limitations, this chart does not list all drugs for migraines. For a more complete list, see the full report at www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org.

^A "Generic" indicates that this drug is sold under its generic name.

^B Prices are based on nationwide average retail prices for December 2012. Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs obtained prices from data provided by Source Healthcare Analytics, Inc., which is not involved in our analysis or recommendations.

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