



## Our Recommendations

**Triptans** are a class of drugs specifically used to treat migraine headaches. Migraines affect about one in five women and one in 20 men. There are seven drugs in this class. All are brand-name drugs, which can be quite expensive if you need to take them often. None of the triptans is yet available as a less-costly generic.

To help you and your doctor choose the best medicine if you have been diagnosed with migraine, *Consumers Reports* has evaluated the drugs in this category based on their effectiveness, safety, dosing convenience, duration of action, and cost. This two-page brief is a summary of a 16-page report you can access on the Internet at [www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org](http://www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org). You can also learn about other drugs we've analyzed on this free Web site. Our independent evaluations are based on scientific reviews conducted by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. Grants from the Engelberg Foundation and National Library of Medicine help fund *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*.

### DO YOU NEED A TRIPTAN?

If you have non-disabling, mild, infrequent migraines you should first try a nonprescription drug, such as aspirin, an NSAID (like ibuprofen), or Excedrin (which is a combination of acetaminophen, aspirin, and caffeine) to relieve the pain. All are available as generic drugs. Even if your migraine headaches are severe, your doctor may recommend that you try one of these low-cost drugs first. But most people who have moderate to severe migraines will need a triptan (if taking one is not forbidden by their medical history).

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Triptans are effective. For about 60% of people who take one, a triptan reduces pain within two hours. While complete pain relief is not common, it can be enhanced if you take a triptan early in a migraine attack. The triptans also help relieve other migraine symptoms, such as nausea and vomiting.

The triptans should not be taken by people with certain conditions because of risks they can pose to the heart. This includes people with coronary artery disease or angina (chest pain), those who have had a heart attack or stroke, and people who have peripheral vascular disease, uncontrolled high blood pressure, diabetes, or who smoke. In addition, the triptans should be prescribed with caution for men over 40, women over 50, people who have high cholesterol, diabetes, or who are significantly overweight, and those with a family history of early heart disease or stroke.

Taking effectiveness, safety, side effects, and other factors into account, we have chosen three triptans as *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*:

- *Sumatriptan* (Imitrex) – for people with moderate to severe headache pain and symptoms
- *Rizatriptan* (Maxalt) – for people with moderate to severe headache pain and symptoms
- *Naratriptan* (Amerge) – for people with milder migraines who are sensitive to triptan side effects and/or have longer-duration migraines

Each of these drugs has unique strengths. They are chosen *CR Best Buys* largely on their clinical merits and not their cost. The cost for triptan treatment depends entirely on how often you have to use one. Frequent use can be quite costly.

*The information in this brief was last updated in February 2006.*

## What Kind of Headache Do You Have?

Ordinary Periodic	Chronic Daily <sup>1</sup>	Cluster	Migraine
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally mild pain</li> <li>• Do not occur regularly</li> <li>• Lasts 1/2 hour to 3 hours</li> <li>• Dull ache</li> <li>• Pain on both sides of head</li> <li>• No nausea or vomiting</li> <li>• No visual disturbance or auras.<sup>2</sup> Mild sensitivity to light or noise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mild to severe pain</li> <li>• Occur at least 15 days per month for 3 months</li> <li>• Lasts at least 4 hours if untreated</li> <li>• Pain dull or stabbing and jolting</li> <li>• No nausea or vomiting</li> <li>• No visual disturbance or auras</li> <li>• Mild sensitivity to light and noise, if any</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Severe pain usually centered on one side behind the eye</li> <li>• Sharp, stabbing pain</li> <li>• Short attacks usually last 30 minutes to one hour but can be up to 3 hours if untreated</li> <li>• Can be more than one attack a day. Attacks come in waves and can disappear for months or years.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate to severe pain, pulsating or throbbing</li> <li>• Periodic attacks (several a year to one or two a month) that last from 4 to 72 hours if untreated<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Nausea with or without vomiting and sensitivity to movement, light and/or noise</li> <li>• Auras or visual disturbances<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>

(1) There are several types of chronic daily headache. Some may be ordinary mild headaches that occur 15 or more days a month. Others present with different symptoms.













(2) Auras are often visual disturbances but can also feel like numbness or weakness on one side of your body. For example, you may see dots or shapes or flickering lights. They can obscure your vision.

Auras are associated with migraine and usually precede a migraine attack.

(3) Experience of at least five attacks that fit the criteria in this column leads to a diagnosis of migraine. Migraine sufferers average about one attack a month but 10% will have an attack every week.

(4) One in six migraine sufferers have auras.

## Triptan Costs

Generic Name and Dose	Brand Name	Maximum Allowed Dose Per 24 Hours	Price Per Dose <sup>1</sup>	Average Monthly Cost <sup>1</sup> (If two migraines a month and take one pill or dose per attack)	Average Monthly Cost <sup>1</sup> (If two migraines a month and take maximum allowed amount per attack over 24 hours)
Almotriptan tablet 6.25 mg	Axert	12.5mg	\$22	\$44	\$88
Almotriptan tablet 12.5 mg	Axert	12.5mg	\$23	\$46	\$46
Eletriptan tablet 20 mg	Relpax	80mg	\$24	\$48	\$192
Eletriptan tablet 40 mg	Relpax	80mg	\$22	\$44	\$88
Frovatriptan tablet 2.5 mg	Frova	7.5mg	\$24	\$48	\$144
 Naratriptan tablet 1 mg	Amerge	5mg	\$26	\$52	\$260
 Naratriptan tablet 2.5 mg	Amerge	5mg	\$25	\$50	\$100
 Rizatriptan tablet 5 mg	Maxalt	30mg	\$22	\$44	\$264
 Rizatriptan tablet 10 mg	Maxalt	30mg	\$23	\$46	\$138
 Rizatriptan dissolvable tablet 5 mg	Maxalt MLT	30mg	\$23	\$46	\$276
 Rizatriptan dissolvable tablet 10 mg	Maxalt MLT	30mg	\$23	\$46	\$138
 Sumatriptan nasal 5 mg	Imitrex	40mg	\$33	\$66	\$528
 Sumatriptan nasal 20 mg	Imitrex	40mg	\$32	\$64	\$128
 Sumatriptan tablet 25 mg	Imitrex	200mg	\$25	\$50	\$400
 Sumatriptan tablet 50 mg	Imitrex	200mg	\$22	\$44	\$176
 Sumatriptan tablet 100 mg	Imitrex	200mg	\$21	\$42	\$84
 Sumatriptan injectables 6 mg	Imitrex	6mg	\$79 <sup>2</sup>	\$158	\$158
Zolmitriptan tablet 2.5 mg	Zomig	10mg	\$22	\$44	\$176
Zolmitriptan tablet 5 mg	Zomig	10mg	\$24	\$48	\$96
Zolmitriptan dissolvable tablet 2.5 mg	Zomig ZMT	10mg	\$22	\$44	\$176
Zolmitriptan dissolvable tablet 5 mg	Zomig ZMT	10mg	\$25	\$50	\$100
Zolmitriptan nasal 5 mg	Zomig	10mg	\$32	\$64	\$128

(1) Prices per dose and monthly costs derive from national average retail costs for September 2005, rounded to the nearest dollar. Information derived by *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* based on data provided by Wolters Kluwer Health, Pharmaceutical Audit Suite.

(2) This price averaged over four injectable forms available.