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[Basics](#) [In-Depth](#) [Resources](#)

[Definition](#)

[Symptoms](#)

[Causes](#)

[Risk factors](#)

[Preparing for your appointment](#)

[Tests and diagnosis](#)

[Treatments and drugs](#)

[Alternative medicine](#)

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[Prevention](#)

Causes

By Mayo Clinic Staff

Rebound headaches can develop if you frequently use headache medication. Although the risk of developing medication-overuse headache varies depending on the medication, any acute headache medication has the potential to lead to rebound headaches, including:

- **Simple pain relievers.** Common pain relievers such as aspirin and acetaminophen (Tylenol, others) may contribute to rebound headaches — especially if you exceed the recommended daily dosages. Pain relievers such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin IB, others) and naproxen sodium (Aleve) have a low risk of contributing to medication-overuse headaches.
- **Combination pain relievers.** Over-the-counter (OTC) pain relievers that combine caffeine, aspirin and acetaminophen (Excedrin, others) are common culprits. This group also includes prescription medications such as Fiorinal, which

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contains the sedative butalbital.

Butalbital-containing compounds have an especially high risk of causing rebound headaches, so it's best not to take them to treat headaches. If you do take this type of drug, limit its use to no more than four days a month.

- **Migraine medications.** Various migraine medications have been linked with rebound headaches, including triptans (Imitrex, Zomig, others) and certain ergots — such as ergotamine (Ergomar, others). These medications have a moderate risk of causing medication-overuse headaches. The ergot dihydroergotamine (D.H.E. 45) appears to have a lower potential for leading to this problem.
- **Opiates.** Painkillers derived from opium or from synthetic opium compounds include combinations of codeine and acetaminophen (Tylenol with Codeine No. 3 and No. 4, others). These medications have a high risk of causing rebound headaches.

Daily doses of caffeine — from your morning coffee, your afternoon soda, and pain relievers and other products containing this mild stimulant — may fuel rebound headaches, as well. Read product labels to make sure you're not wiring your system with more caffeine than you realize.

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Symptoms

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