

# Cluster Headache Treatment Guidelines Handout

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## What are cluster headaches?

Cluster headaches are a type of primary headache disorder known for their severe, recurrent headache pain. These primary headaches are characterized by intense, debilitating pain typically centered around one eye or one side of the head, which can affect deep brain stimulation.

Cluster headaches are divided into two main categories: episodic and chronic. Episodic cluster headaches are marked by periods of headache attacks lasting weeks to months, followed by remission periods without any headache pain. Chronic cluster headache, on the other hand, involves ongoing headache attacks that can persist for over a year without significant remission.

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## Treatment options

Below are several treatment options for cluster headaches commonly used to manage headache attacks.

### Oxygen

Administering oxygen is a well-known acute treatment for cluster headache attacks. Inhaling oxygen at a flow rate of 7 liters per minute for 15 minutes via a face mask can provide rapid relief from intense headache pain.

### Sumatriptan

Sumatriptan, a medication used to treat cluster headaches acutely, is administered subcutaneously. A dose of 6 mg can be given, and if necessary, the dose can be repeated within 24 hours.

### Intranasal dihydroergotamine

Intranasal dihydroergotamine is another effective treatment for cluster headaches. A 0.5-mg nasal spray administered bilaterally can help alleviate cluster headache pain. This medication works by constricting blood vessels and reducing inflammation, providing relief from the intense headache pain associated with a refractory cluster headache.

### Intranasal lidocaine

For some patients, intranasal lidocaine can provide quick relief from when cluster headache attacks occur. Administering 1 mL of 10 percent lidocaine with a cotton swab bilaterally for 5 minutes can significantly increase headache pain relief.

## **Intranasal capsaicin**

Intranasal capsaicin, derived from chili peppers, is an innovative treatment for cluster headaches. Placing capsaicin via a cotton swab in the ipsilateral nostril twice a day for seven days can help alleviate headache disorders.

## **Other treatment options**

Episodic cluster headaches may also respond to noninvasive vagus nerve stimulation using a handheld device.

Due to the frequency, severity, and incapacitating nature of cluster headaches, preventive medication is essential for all patients.

Prednisone or an occipital nerve block can provide immediate relief. Meanwhile, Galcanezumab is reserved for cases where other treatments are ineffective.

Additionally, noninvasive transcutaneous supraorbital nerve stimulation and vagus nerve stimulation can help reduce the frequency of cluster headaches.

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## **Reference**

Beck, E., Sieber, W. J., & Trejo, R. (2005). Management of cluster headache. *American Family Physician*, 71(4), 717–724. <https://www.aafp.org/pubs/afp/issues/2005/0215/p717.html#treatment>