

Headaches: When to Contact a Medical Professional

Take the following symptoms seriously. If you cannot see your health care provider immediately, go to the emergency room or call 911:

- Your headache comes on suddenly and is explosive or violent.
- You would describe your headache as "your worst ever", even if you are prone to headaches.
- Your headache is associated with slurred speech, change in vision, problems moving your arms or legs, loss of balance, confusion, or memory loss.
- Your headache gets progressively worse over a 24-hour period.
- Your headache is accompanied by fever, stiff neck, nausea, and vomiting.
- Your headache occurs with a head injury.
- Your headache is severe and localized to one eye with redness in that eye.
- You are over age 50 and your headaches just began, especially with impaired vision and pain while chewing.

See your provider soon if:

- Your headaches wake you up from sleep.
- A headache lasts more than a few days.
- Headaches are worse in the morning.
- You have a history of headaches but they have changed in pattern or intensity.
- You have headaches frequently, and there is no known cause.

Headaches: Home Care

Keep a headache diary to help identify the source or trigger of your symptoms. Then modify your environment or habits to avoid future headaches. When a headache occurs, write down the date and time the headache began, what you ate for the past 24 hours, how long you slept the night before, what you were doing and thinking about just before the headache started, any stress in your life, how long the headache lasts, and what you did to make it stop. After a period of time, you may begin to see a pattern.

- A headache may be relieved by resting with your eyes closed and head supported. Relaxation techniques can help. A massage or heat applied to the back of the upper neck can be effective in relieving tension headaches.
- Try acetaminophen, aspirin, or ibuprofen for tension headaches. DO NOT give aspirin to children because of the risk of Reye syndrome.
- Migraine headaches may respond to aspirin, naproxen, or combination migraine medications.

If over-the-counter remedies do not control your pain, talk to your doctor about possible prescription medications. Sometimes medications to relieve nausea and vomiting are helpful for other migraine symptoms.

If you get headaches often, your doctor may prescribe medication to prevent headaches before they occur. If you are using pain medications more than 2 days a week, you may be suffering from rebound headaches. Rebound headaches are caused by a cycle of using pain medications for short-term relief, followed by the headache pain returning for increasingly longer periods of time despite taking more pain medications. All types of pain pills (including over-the-counter drugs), muscle relaxants, some decongestants, and caffeine can cause this pattern. If you think this may be a problem for you, talk to your health care provider.

For more information on headaches check out this website: www.medline.gov.

Sponsored by: The Wellness Committee
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