



# DAY IN DAY OUT

WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR LIFESTYLE

## WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR HEAD HURTS

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Headaches are one of the most common forms of pain and it's a major reason cited for days missed at work or school as well as visits to the doctor. Indeed, most of us get headaches from time to time. Some may be mild while others can cause throbbing pain. They can last for minutes or days. There are many different types of headaches. In fact, the International Classification of Headache Disorders, published by the International Headache Society, has classified more than 150 types of primary and secondary headache disorders.

### TYPES OF HEADACHES

Tension headaches are the most common type of headache. They can cause a feeling of painful pressure on the head and neck. Tension headaches occur when the muscles in your head and neck tighten, often because of stress or anxiety. Things like intense work, missed meals, jaw clenching, or too little sleep can bring on tension headaches.

Migraines are the second-most common type of headache. They affect more than 1 in 10 people. Migraines tend to run in families and most often affect women. The pain can be severe, with pulsing and throbbing, and can last for several days. Migraine symptoms can also include blurry vision and nausea.



Migraines are complex and can be disabling. Certain smells, noises, or bright flashing lights can bring on a migraine. Other triggers include lack of sleep, certain foods, skipped meals, smoking, stress, or even an approaching thunderstorm. Keeping a headache diary can help to identify the specific causes of your migraines. Avoiding those triggers or using prescription medications could help prevent or lessen the severity of future migraines.

A less common but more severe type of headache comes on suddenly in “clusters” at the same time of day or night for weeks. Cluster headaches may strike one side of the head, often near one eye, with a sharp or burning pain. These headaches are more common in men and in smokers.

In rare cases, a headache may warn of a serious illness. Get medical help right away if you have a headache after a blow to your head, or if you have a headache along with fever, confusion, loss of consciousness, or pain in the eye or ear.

## TREATMENT & PREVENTION

When headaches occur three or more times a month, preventive treatment is usually recommended. Migraine treatment is aimed at relieving symptoms and preventing additional attacks. Drug therapy, biofeedback training, stress reduction, and elimination of certain foods from the diet are the most common methods of preventing and controlling migraines and other vascular headaches. Drug therapy for migraines is often combined with biofeedback and relaxation training. One of the most commonly used drugs for the relief of migraine symptoms is sumatriptan.

The first step in caring for a tension-type headache involves treating any specific disorder or disease that may be causing it. A physician may suggest using analgesics, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, or antidepressants to treat a tension-type headache that is not associated with a disease.

Headaches might arise because of another medical condition, such as swollen sinuses or head injury. In these cases, treating the underlying problem usually relieves headache pain as well. But most headaches—including tension headaches and migraines—aren't caused by a separate illness.

Over-the-counter medicines such as aspirin, ibuprofen, or acetaminophen can help reduce the pain. Lifestyle changes to relax and reduce stress might help, such as yoga, stretching, massage, and other tension relievers. However, be careful not to overuse headache medications. Overuse can cause “rebound” headaches, making headaches more frequent and painful. People with repeating headaches, such as migraines or tension headaches, are especially at risk. Experts advise not taking certain pain-relief medicines for headaches more than 3 times a week.

Do your best to identify the kind of headache you have and, if you can't manage it yourself, seek help. Remember there are preventive behavioral steps and medicines that can help manage headaches. But if the pain is severe or lasting, get medical care.



## PREVENT HEADACHES

- » Manage stress
- » Get enough quality sleep (aim for 7-8 hours a night)
- » Eat regularly scheduled, nutrient-dense meals
- » Exercise regularly and maintain a healthy weight
- » Ask your doctor if medications might help prevent returning headaches