

The Wellness News

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How to Manage and Prevent Headaches

Headaches are one of the most common health complaints people experience. They can vary from intensely painful to mildly irritating. So, apart from prescription or over-the-counter medication, what else can you do to manage the pain? Improving or maintaining your overall wellness is usually the first step.

What is a headache?

Headache is defined as pain in the head or upper neck. The pain occurs when signals communicate between the brain, blood vessels, and surrounding nerves. The exact cause of headaches is not well understood; however, there are several known triggers.

What are common headache triggers?

Headaches that come on suddenly are typically due to an illness. However, tension headaches are usually triggered by emotional stress, alcohol use, skipping meals, changes in sleep patterns, excessive medication use, tension, depression, exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke or strong odors, eyestrain, and neck or back strain due to poor posture.

Common Types of Headaches:

- **Tension headaches:** The most common type of headaches. These headaches can cause mild to moderate pain and come and go over an extended period of time.
- **Migraines:** Pain is moderate to severe, often described as pounding, throbbing pain. They can last from a few hours to a few days and generally occur 1 to 4 times per month. Migraines are associated with symptoms such as light sensitivity; noise or odors; nausea or vomiting; loss of appetite; and stomach upset or abdominal pain.
- **Sinus headaches:** Deep pain in the cheekbones, forehead or bridge of the nose. The pain usually increases with sudden head movement or straining and usually occurs with other sinus symptoms, such as nasal discharge, feeling of fullness in the ears, fever, and facial swelling.

Stay well hydrated! Drink at least eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day to help prevent dehydration, which can lead to headaches.

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Preventive Steps

Tension headaches are the most preventable type of headache and there is much you can do to limit and reduce pain.

Stress management.

1. Simplify your life.
2. Adjust your attitude.
3. Let go of the things you can't control.
4. Take a break.
5. Manage your time wisely.

Improve your posture. Good posture can prevent your muscles from tightening up. When standing, hold your head up straight with your chin in, stretch the top of your head toward the ceiling, keep your shoulders back, and tuck your stomach in. When sitting, make sure your thighs are parallel to the ground and your head and shoulders aren't slumped forward.

Exercise regularly. Walking, cycling and swimming are typically good choices. Remember to start slowly as exercising too hard can trigger some types of headaches.

Get enough sleep. Most people need about 6-9 hours of sleep a night. If you can't fall asleep within 15 minutes, get up and do a quiet activity (like reading) until you feel drowsy.

Don't skip meals — especially breakfast.

Avoid excess caffeine. Sometimes caffeine helps curb headaches and can be found in many headache medications. However, heavy daily caffeine use — more than about 4 to 7 cups of coffee — can cause headaches and irritability.

Relax. Take time to unwind every day.

Keep a headache diary. A diary can help you understand what triggers your tension headaches. Record when your headaches begin, what you were doing at the time, how long they last and what, if anything, provides relief. Using a headache diary can help you notice patterns in your daily life that may cause or worsen your tension headaches.

Treatment Ideas

Apply heat or ice to sore muscles. Your choice of treatment is a matter of preference. Some people find heat more helpful, while others prefer cold. A hot bath or shower may also be effective.

Muscle relaxation. Massage can help to ease muscle tension and eliminate headache pain. Gently massage the muscles around your head, shoulders and neck, or have someone else do the massage for you.

Medication. A range of medications, both prescription and OTC, are available to stop or reduce the pain of an existing headache attack. However, pain medications don't cure headaches; they just ease the symptoms temporarily.



Chiropractic. A chiropractor can use spinal manipulation or chiropractic adjustments to help relieve pain. They may also offer advice on posture, ergonomics and helpful exercises.

Call Your Health Coach for More Information 1-800-433-2320