

Handling Headaches

Headaches can bring pain and discomfort. They can even prevent you from accomplishing the things you need to do. Learning the causes, symptoms, treatment, and self-care of the most widespread kinds can help you find relief. The two most common types are tension and migraine headaches.

Tension Headaches

These headaches are usually caused by tight muscles in the shoulders, neck, scalp, or jaw brought on by anxiety, depression, or stress. Holding your neck or head at an uncomfortable angle can cause them, too.

Symptoms may include a dull ache on both sides or all around your head, or tightness in the jaw or neck. These headaches often strike in the middle of the day. They tend to begin slowly and gradually get worse.

Migraine Headaches

Among other things, migraines can be triggered by alcohol, chocolate, some cheeses, MSG, and too little caffeine or sleep. Even changing weather, bright sunshine, and hormonal shifts cause migraines in some people. Four out of five people who get them have a family history of the problem and three times more women than men are affected by migraines.

Migraines can cause severe throbbing, pounding pain that often begins on one side of the head. Sufferers often experience sensitivity to light and noise, nausea and vomiting. Some migraine sufferers have an aura before the headache hits that may include seeing jagged lines, flashing lights or hallucinations.

Other Kinds of Headaches

Other types of headaches include:

- Rebound headaches, often caused by overusing pain medications
- Cluster headaches, which occur many times a day
- Sinus headaches, which create pain behind the cheeks, nose, and eyes

In rare cases, headaches can warn of a serious condition, such as meningitis, a brain tumor, stroke or extremely high blood pressure.

Self-Care

Over-the-counter pain medications and rest can often ease headaches. Effective self-care can also include:

- Applying heat or cold to your head
- Getting enough sleep, as well as going to bed and getting up at the same time each day
- Eating at regular times
- Exercising for 30 to 60 minutes most days
- Practicing yoga, meditation, and other relaxation therapies

Seek medical treatment if self-care fails to relieve your headaches.

To learn more about preventing and coping with headaches, visit the health and wellness section of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas website.

Sources: The Weather Channel; National Public Radio, 2012