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Migraine and Tension Headaches

A headache is pain in the head and/or upper neck. The two most common kinds of headaches are migraines and tension headaches.



Tension Headaches

Tension headaches are usually caused by the muscles in your head tightening. This can be due to poor posture, repetitive neck movement or strain, stress, or dehydration. Many times the cause of the muscle tension is unknown.

Symptoms of Tension Headaches

- Constant dull, achy feeling on both sides of the head
- Tight feeling in the head or neck muscles
- Begins slowly and gradually
- Often starts in the middle of the day

Relieving Tension Headaches

- Drink water -- dehydration can often cause headaches
- Put a heat pack or an ice pack on your head or neck
- Take a hot shower or relax in a comfortable position
- Talk to your health care provider about the best medicine to take for your headache

Migraine Headaches

Migraine headaches are different than tension headaches. Migraine is a condition that includes headaches and can also include changes in vision (seeing flashing lights, zigzag lines, or blind spots), feeling numbness or tingling, changes in senses (sense of smell, taste, or touch), or a general "fuzzy" feeling.

Symptoms of Migraine Headaches

- Intense throbbing or pounding on one side or both sides of the head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Changes in how you see, including blurred vision, flashing lights, or blind spots
- Being bothered by light, noise, or odors
- Feeling tired, confused, or light headed
- Feeling cold or sweaty
- Changes in your sense of smell, taste, or touch

Triggers of Migraine Headaches

Food Triggers

- **Alcohol**, especially red wine
- **Caffeine**, too much caffeine or too little caffeine resulting in withdrawal
- Foods that have **nitrates** such as hot dogs and lunch meats
- Foods that contain **MSG** (monosodium glutamate), a flavor enhancer commonly found in fast foods, spices, seasonings, instant soups and broths
- Foods that contain **tyramine** such as aged cheeses, soy products, hard sausages, smoked fish, fava beans and Chianti wine
- **Aspartame**, a sugar substitute found in products like NutraSweet® and Equal® and many diet foods

Environmental Triggers

- Strong odors, bright lights or loud noises
- Changes in weather

Physical or Behavioral Triggers

- Too much or too little sleep
- Stress or anxiety, or rest after being stressed or anxious
- Missing meals or fasting
- Hormone changes during menstrual periods

Relieving Migraine Headaches

- Lie down in a dark, quiet room
- Put a cold compress or rag over your forehead
- Massage your scalp and temples gently
- Talk to your health care provider about medications you can use

Headache Prevention

- Try to avoid foods or other things that seem to cause headaches for you
- Get plenty of sleep
- Try to relax and reduce the stress in your life
- Take time away from things that are stressful
- Get regular exercise
- Talk to your health care provider about medication

When to Call your Health Care Provider

Call your health care provider if:

- Your headaches become more frequent or get worse
- Your migraine is different than the migraines you usually experience
- Your migraine lasts for 2 or more days
- You have lost weight without trying
- You have weakness or paralysis that lasts after the headache
- The headache is brought on by coughing, sneezing, or straining while on the toilet.