

When it's not a migraine

Understanding and treating headaches



Tension headaches

There are two types of tension headaches — episodic and chronic. They differ in frequency and severity. Episodic headaches are random. Chronic headaches occur every day. Both types may have the same symptoms. They include tightness in the neck, soreness, pressure or pulling sensations around the head. There also can be a dull, steady pain in the forehead, temples, or back of the head and/or neck. Depression, anxiety, stress and poor posture often go with tension headaches.

Sinus headaches

These headaches result from sinus pressure in the forehead, behind the nose, or around the eyes and cheeks. Pressure can build up as a result of allergies, or a sinus infection following a cold or the flu. When sinuses are blocked or inflamed, mucus can't drain. Then, headaches may occur. These headaches often feel worse first thing in the morning. Sometimes, people believe that migraine headaches are "sinus" headaches.

Cluster headaches

Cluster headaches are known for their severity and intensity. The pain strikes with little warning, and the attacks come in groups, or clusters. Each headache often lasts 30 to 45 minutes. Most people suffer up to four a day during a cluster period. These headaches occur on one side of the head. They rarely switch sides between attacks. The pain usually begins as a stabbing sensation over one eye. It then moves to the forehead, temple and cheek on the same side of the face. Cluster headaches aren't hereditary. They seem to affect men more than women. Many sufferers are smokers. However, definite causes are unknown.

Treatment

See your doctor for diagnosis and treatment if you have frequent or severe headaches. Often, cluster headaches are treated with medication. For other types, your doctor may recommend an over-the-counter pain reliever, lifestyle changes or other treatments. You may need counseling if your headaches come with depression or anxiety. Some techniques that you may want to try once you have been diagnosed, but still are being studied, include:

- **Relaxation training.** Recognize the body's response to stress. You'll also learn how to reduce stress.
- **Progressive muscle relaxation.** Different muscle groups are tensed and then relaxed in a certain order.
- **Biofeedback.** The body's physical responses are monitored. This helps perfect relaxation techniques.

Want to learn more about headaches or other health issues? Call us any time — day or night.

TDD/TTY callers, please call the National Relay Center at 1-800-855-2880 and ask for the number above.