



OH MY ACHING HEAD!

When your head hurts, trying to determine the cause is enough to give you a headache in the first place. But you can take comfort in the fact that headaches are among the most common pain conditions in the world, with nearly 75% of adults having experienced at least one within the past year.

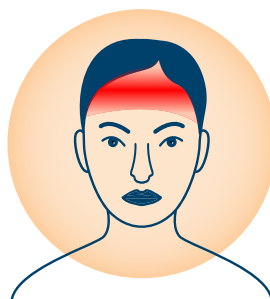
A headache is a pain in any region of the head. It may be felt on one or both sides of the head, isolated to a specific location, or even felt radiating from one area to another. Most people describe headaches with phrases like a “dull ache,” “sharp pain,” “throbbing sensation” or “vicelike.” These pains can last for a few minutes or even several days.

With so many headache types and symptoms, it can be difficult to immediately uncover the cause. However, most headaches fall under two main categories, primary headaches and secondary headaches.

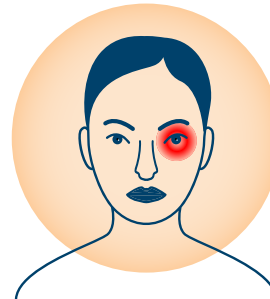
PRIMARY HEADACHES

A “run-of-the-mill” headache that’s not caused by any underlying disease is most often referred to as a primary headache. These can have several causes such as brain chemistry, nerves and blood vessels around the skull, or even the muscles in the head and neck area. Family genetics also can be responsible for a lot of headaches. If your mother or father had frequent headaches, chances are you do, too.

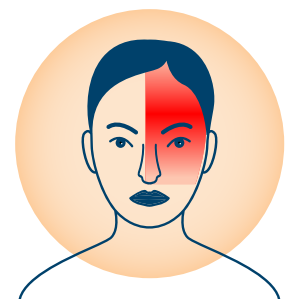
A few types of primary headaches include:



TENSION



CLUSTER



MIGRAINE

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TENSION HEADACHES. The most common form of headache, a tension headache generally has a mild to moderate pain level. Most say it feels like a tightness around the head, dull pain or even tenderness in and around the scalp. If you find yourself taking over-the-counter medication more than a couple times a week or if it disrupts your life, see your healthcare provider.

CLUSTER HEADACHES. These most often occur for a period of time (weeks or months), then perhaps not again for months or even years. They can produce intense pain around one eye or on a particular side of the head and can be extremely painful. If they continue, there are prescription medications that can help break the cycle.

MIGRAINES. Most people experience warning signs that a migraine is about to occur. This generally involves vision changes called “aura occurrences” and can look like flashes of light or even blind spots. Others may have tingling in their arms and legs, while some even have difficulty speaking. Many migraine sufferers also have nausea, vomiting, and extreme sensitivity to light and sound. Migraine episodes can last for hours or even days and will interfere with normal activity. It’s important to share as much information as possible about your migraines with your healthcare provider so he or she can develop a plan to help you manage or even prevent them.

It’s important to manage your expectations when going into treatment because many people have to try a couple of medications before finding one that works for them.

KEEP A MIGRAINE JOURNAL

Prior to the migraine:

- ✔ What were you doing?
- ✔ What did you eat and drink?
- ✔ What were your symptoms?

SECONDARY HEADACHES

A secondary headache is one that occurs from an underlying condition that triggers the headache. This may be a mild condition or a signal that something more severe is happening.

There is an exhaustive list of secondary headache causes, but a few more common ones are listed below:



NASAL OR SINUS INFECTION. These infections typically result from a common cold, causing swelling in the nasal passages. Most symptoms can be treated with over-the-counter medications, but if they persist for more than a week, seek medical attention.



DEHYDRATION. This occurs when your body loses more fluids than it takes in. Dehydration can be a dangerous condition that affects many organs in the body, so it’s critical to get to a cool location and begin replacing the lost liquids. If symptoms like dizziness and confusion occur, seek immediate medical attention.



CONCUSSION. Any time you receive a blow to the head, there’s a possibility for a concussion. This is a brain injury that is usually temporary and can affect concentration, memory, balance and coordination. If you suspect you’ve had a concussion, avoid staring at electronic devices and see your healthcare provider immediately to prevent your symptoms from worsening or becoming permanent.



PANIC ATTACKS. Coming on suddenly without warning, panic attacks can begin with a sense of danger and can escalate into physical symptoms like a headache and shortness of breath. Many people who have experienced panic attacks recognize the signs and know how to work through the episodes. If this is a new experience for you, discuss what has happened with a healthcare provider to rule out other causes.

Headaches can be a minor inconvenience *or* a warning sign that something more severe is happening within your body. If a couple of aspirins don’t do the trick, there’s no need to suffer in silence. Discuss your symptoms with a healthcare provider so your aching head will become a thing of the past.

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