

# HEADACHE

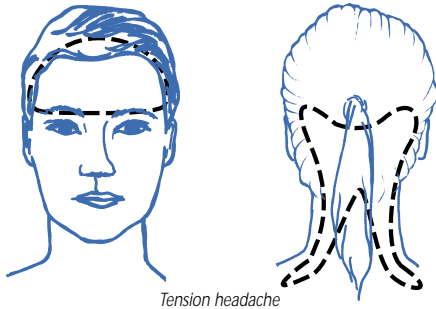
There are four common types of headache: tension headache, migraine, cluster headache and sinus headache. Headaches can happen at any age. The pain is your body's way of saying HELP. Finding the cause of your headache and learning how to deal with it can help you cut down the number of headaches you get and how painful they are. You do not have to suffer a headache as there are many effective over-the-counter pain relievers available as treatment.

There are four common types of headache.

## Tension Headache

Tension headaches are caused by muscle contractions (spasms) over the neck and scalp. Stress, worry and anxiety e.g. pressure at work or a family argument can cause tension headaches causing pain at the back of your neck or across the top of your forehead. It can feel like a band around your head or a weight on top of your head and/or shoulders.

Working in the same position for many hours each day (such as using a computer) or poor posture can also cause a tension headache.

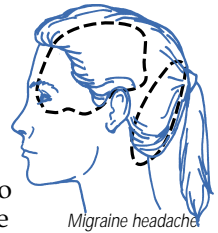


Tension headache

## Migraine

Migraine is a severe headache often felt on one side of the head.

Some people have warning signs (aura symptoms) up to an hour before the headache starts e.g. flashing lights or zigzag lines, tingling or numbness (pins and needles) on one side of the body in the lips, fingers, face or hands. Nausea and vomiting commonly occur. (see *Migraine Fact Card*).



Migraine headache

## Cluster Headache

These headaches occur in bouts (clusters) usually lasting for weeks or months and are separated by pain-free periods of months or years.

Severe pain occurs behind one eye or on one half of the head, with redness and watering of the eye and blockage of the nostril on that side.

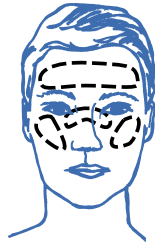
It can last for 10 minutes to two hours and may occur again several times in 24 hours, often waking the person from sleep.

## IMPORTANT See your doctor if:

- the headache does not respond to over-the-counter pain relievers within a day (see *Pain Relievers Fact Card*)
- you have a severe headache lasting more than four hours
- your headache starts after exercise, sex, straining or coughing
- you suspect your headache is caused by any medicines you are taking
- your headache is worse in the morning then improves
- you have any disturbances in your sight, loss of balance or are vomiting
- you have any neck stiffness
- you get drowsy, confused, have trouble remembering things
- you have a fever, joint and muscle pains
- you are on the contraceptive pill
- you have a sudden, new, severe headache
- your headache occurs after a head injury or trauma
- your headache comes back and is more severe.

## Sinus Headache

This is caused by increased mucus production within the sinus which cannot drain. Pressure builds up causing pain. The pain is felt behind and around the eye, and usually only one side is affected. The headache may be associated with sinus congestion. The affected sinus often feels tender and is often worse when bending forward or lying down. (See *Hay fever & Sinus Problems* Fact Card).



Sinus headache

## CAUSES

Some people find that certain things start (trigger) their headaches. Triggers aren't the same for everyone and they may be different for the same person at different times.

Triggers include:

- stress, tension, anxiety
- hormone changes e.g. periods, pregnancy, the oral contraceptive pill, and hormone replacement therapy
- coffee withdrawal
- too much alcohol
- fasting, delaying or missing meals
- too little or too much sleep
- bright or flickering light, glare
- weather or altitude changes, heat or cold
- strong smells or fumes
- stuff smoke-filled rooms
- some medicines (ask your pharmacist).

## SELF CARE

Find out what things trigger your headaches and avoid them if possible. Keep a simple daily record (e.g. on a calendar) of your headaches and activities to find your trigger factors. Have someone massage your tense muscles. Plan ahead - rearrange activities to remove stress - let others help. Learn to relax (see *Relaxation Techniques* Fact Card) Exercise regularly (see *Exercise and The Heart* Fact Card)

Your Self Care pharmacist

Eat regular healthy meals.  
Get regular sleep (see *Sleeping Problems* Fact Card)  
Wear sunglasses to reduce glare.  
Drink 6-8 glasses of water each day.  
Check with your doctor first if you have kidney or heart problems.  
Drink plenty of water before going to bed if you have had too much alcohol.  
Have a regular break if you work in the same position all day.  
Make sure you have good posture.

## MEDICINES

Simple pain relievers can help e.g. paracetamol, aspirin, and ibuprofen. Ask your pharmacist and read the *Pain Relievers* Fact Card.  
For sinus headache - apply a warm, damp cloth over the sinus area, use an inhalation or a decongestant medicine (ask your pharmacist).  
Your doctor may prescribe other medicines for severe headaches or migraines.  
Take the right dose of medicine at the right time. Your doctor and pharmacist will advise you on how much and when.

### Other relevant Fact Cards:

- |                              |                                      |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Migraine</i>              | <i>Pain Relievers</i>                |
| <i>Relaxation Techniques</i> | <i>Hayfever &amp; Sinus Problems</i> |
| <i>Sleeping Problems</i>     | <i>Exercise and The Heart</i>        |

### Contact:

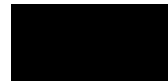
Your doctor - listed under Medical Practitioners in the yellow pages of the phone book.

Your Self Care pharmacist. To find: (02) 6283 4777

In case of poisoning, phone the **Poisons Information Centre** on 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask your pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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