

HEADACHES

Your Guide to Prevention and Relief

Headache Self-Care

- Get your blood pressure checked if you suffer frequent headaches. **Why:** High blood pressure is the most common condition that causes persistent headaches.
- Consider having an eye exam if you often get headaches. A vision problem may be a factor.
- Remember that sinus headaches are not very common. **One sign:** The headache gets worse if you bend over.
- Take control of any allergies you might have. They may be the cause of your headaches.
- Wear sunglasses in bright light. Squinting tenses your face and head muscles and can produce tension headaches.
- Avoid stressful situations that may trigger headaches, such as shopping in crowded malls, heading into heavy traffic or rushing.

When to Seek Help

If a headache:

- is accompanied by fever or nausea
 - involves pain in the eye, sinus or ear
 - occurs after a blow to the head
 - persists for more than 2–3 days
 - keeps recurring, especially in the morning
 - interferes with normal life
- ... talk with your doctor.

Try biofeedback for persistent headaches.

How it works: Using a computer and monitoring devices, a biofeedback therapist measures skin temperature and muscular tension, then prescribes relaxation exercises to help control circulation and muscles.

Massage therapy may help reduce muscle tension, strain and stress — all causes of tension headaches.



The Headache Types

Tension headaches (also known as muscular contraction headaches) account for 90 percent of everyday headaches. They're usually caused by excessive muscle tension in the scalp and neck, often resulting from stress.

Vascular headaches are linked to changes in blood flow to the brain. There are two main varieties:

1. **Migraines** feature often intense throbbing pain on one side of the head and may be preceded by seeing flashing lights or experiencing lightheadedness. They may be accompanied by nausea, vomiting, dizziness and sensitivity to light and noise.
2. **Cluster headaches** occur once or more per day for several weeks or months, then disappear for months or even years. Symptoms include extreme pain centered on or near one eye, which may become red and teary.

Organic headaches, which are rare, are usually the result of another underlying condition. **Examples:** tumor, infection or other disease.

Relieving Common Headaches

1. **TAKE** an over-the-counter pain reliever as soon as pain begins. **Why?** Pain relievers work faster — and better — if taken when pain starts rather than when it is at its worst.
2. **SEEK** quiet. A calm environment helps alleviate pain.
3. **TRY** heat to help relieve tension headaches. **Examples:** a warm pad to the back of the head, warm bath or shower.
4. **DO** your best to relax emotionally and physically.
5. **DON'T** give up if headaches are severe and fail to respond to common treatment. Talk to your doctor. There are many options, including special headache medications that a physician can prescribe.

Preventing Headaches

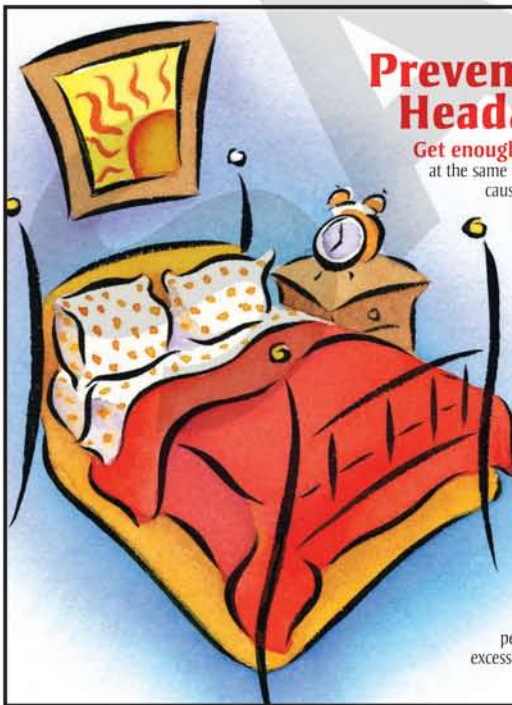
Get enough sleep. Go to bed and get up at the same times each day to avoid headaches caused by too little or too much sleep.

Don't skip meals. Going hungry allows blood sugar levels to drop — a common headache trigger.

Control stress. Stress is a frequent trigger of tension headaches and migraines.

Avoid the three Cs. Cheese (the ripened varieties such as Brie and cheddar), chocolate and citrus fruits contain amines, substances that in some people can cause blood vessels to swell.

Watch what's around you. Many environmental factors can contribute to headaches. **Examples:** smoky rooms, perfume, paint, glue, varnish, excessive noise and glaring lights.



Keep a **headache diary**, a record of everything you eat and drink and of when you have headaches. It will help you and your doctor identify foods, beverages, environmental triggers or other factors that may contribute to your headaches.

Is the REST of Your Body Causing Your Headache?

The posture connection. Because muscular contraction is a major cause of headaches, always maintain good posture.

Be comfortable. Stand or sit up straight ... relax your shoulders ... organize your workspace to minimize overreaching ... adjust your seat properly and keep knees higher than your hips.

Rest your eyes. Take occasional breaks to prevent eyestrain. Try looking out a window or focusing on a distant object at least once an hour.

Reduce glare. Adjust lighting so it doesn't shine directly on your computer screen. Use a glare-reducing screen protector.

Always call your doctor if you are concerned or have any questions about your headaches.