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The Posture Connection

Because muscular contraction is a major cause of most headaches, always maintain good posture and take other measures to ease tension in your head, neck and shoulders.

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

Rest Your Eyes. Vary tasks or take occasional breaks to avoid eyestrain when using a computer. **Ideas:** Try looking out a window or focusing on a distant object at least once an hour. Adjust your monitor so you're looking slightly down at it.

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

When to Seek Help

Here are examples of signs that may signal a more serious condition.

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

More Headache Tips

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

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HEADACHES
Your Guide to Prevention and Relief

SAMPLE

HEADACHE BASICS

Whether you get a headache occasionally or every day, there is something you should know. You can learn how to manage the pain — and often even prevent headaches from recurring. Determining what kind of headache you're having is a good first step.

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:

  Migraines feature often intense throbbing pain on one side of the head and may be preceded by flashing lights or lightheadedness. Migraines may be accompanied by nausea, vomiting, dizziness and sensitivity to light and noise.

  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. The nostril on the affected side may become congested.
- **Organic headaches,** which are rare, are usually the result of another underlying condition. **Examples:** tumor, infection or other disease, such as of the brain, eye, nose or sinuses.

The Caffeine Connection

How it hurts: When overused, caffeine can cause withdrawal headaches if you cut back abruptly, a phenomenon called caffeine rebound. **Self-defense:** Drink no more than 200 mg of caffeine or two caffeinated beverages per day. Cut down only gradually.

How it helps: Caffeine can help relieve a headache once the pain has begun. **Reason:** Caffeine may enhance the effect of pain medications. That's why you'll find it in many over-the-counter headache relievers.

Preventing Headaches

Get enough sleep. Go to bed and get up at the same times each day. You'll help regulate your brain's biological clock and avoid headaches that result from too little or too much sleep.

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

Control stress. Stress is a frequent trigger of tension headaches and migraines. **Prevention:** Practice relaxation techniques … massage your neck, shoulders and head … exercise … seek counseling to alleviate feelings of worry, anxiety or anger.

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

Limit other triggers. **Examples:** alcohol, especially red wine; hot dogs and other processed meats; lentils and snow peas; and monosodium glutamate (MSG). **More:** Salty foods, the artificial sweetener aspartame and certain medications may also cause headaches in some people.

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." It will help you and your doctor spot trigger foods or beverages. **Remember:** Three to 12 hours or even a day may pass between consuming a food or drink and the onset of a headache.

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

Relieving Common Headaches

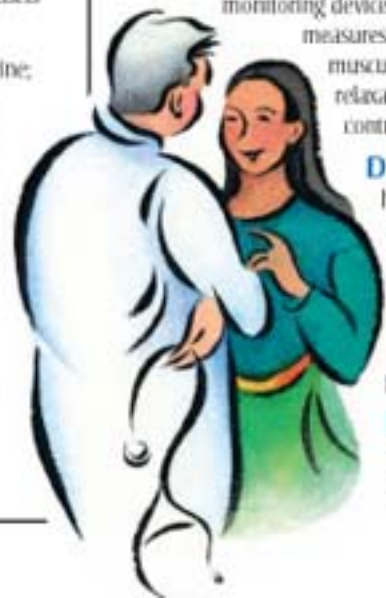
TAKE an over-the-counter pain reliever when needed as soon as pain begins. Why? Pain relievers work faster — and better — if taken when pain starts rather than at its worst.

SEEK quiet. A calm environment helps alleviate pain. At home, find a dark, quiet spot and lie down.

TRY heat to help relieve tension headaches. **Examples:** a warm pad to the back of the head, warm bath or shower.

CONSIDER massage therapy to help reduce muscle strain and create a relaxed feeling … or physical therapy, which uses heat, ice, ultrasound and other measures to relieve muscle tightness and pain.

GIVE biofeedback a try for more 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.



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 a physician can prescribe.

DO your best to relax emotionally and physically.

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