

What Kind of Headache Is It?

Five Types of Headaches



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Do You Know Your Headache Type?

The American College of Physicians estimates that seven out of 10 people in the U.S. have chronic headaches. Headaches are one of the leading causes of missed days from work, costing billions of dollars in lost productivity annually.

General headaches are a common condition that causes pain and discomfort in the head, scalp or neck. While headaches can be mild, in many cases they can cause severe pain, making it difficult to concentrate or perform daily activities. In fact, millions of Americans frequently have headaches that can be disabling.



There are five different types of headaches. Which one describes yours?

TENSION HEADACHES

Tension headaches, the most common type, feel like a constant ache or pressure around the head, especially at the temples or back of the head and neck. Not as severe as migraines, they don't usually cause nausea or vomiting and they rarely halt daily activities.

Over-the-counter treatments, such as aspirin, ibuprofen or acetaminophen are usually sufficient to treat them. Experts believe tension headaches may be caused by the contraction of neck and scalp muscles (including in response to stress), and possibly changes in brain chemicals.

When Painkillers Don't Work

If painkillers are not working, your doctor may prescribe a muscle relaxant, which is a medication that helps stop muscle contractions.

Your doctor may also recommend other treatments, such as:

- Stress management classes to teach you ways to cope with stress and how to relieve tension;
- Biofeedback, which is a relaxation technique that teaches you to manage pain and stress;
- Cognitive behavioral therapy, which is talk therapy that helps you recognize situations that cause you stress, anxiety and tension;
- Acupuncture, which is an alternative therapy that may reduce stress and tension by applying fine needles to specific areas of your body.

CLUSTER HEADACHES

Cluster headaches, which affect more men than women, are recurring headaches that occur in groups or cycles. They appear suddenly and are characterized by severe, debilitating pain on one side of the head. A cluster headache is often accompanied by a watery eye, nasal congestion or a runny nose, all on the same side of the face.

During an attack, people often feel restless and unable to get comfortable. The cause of cluster headaches is unknown, but there may be a genetic component. There is no cure, but medication can cut the frequency and duration.

Tips to Prevent Cluster Headaches

You may be able to prevent cluster headaches by avoiding the following:

- Alcohol
- Tobacco
- Cocaine
- High Altitudes
- Strenuous Activities
- Hot Weather
- Hot Baths
- Foods that contain large amounts of nitrates, such as:
 - Bacon
 - Hot Dogs
 - Preserved Meats

Cluster headaches are not life threatening, but there is no cure for them.

SINUS HEADACHES

Inflammation of the sinuses may decrease the ability for the mucus to drain, increasing pressure within the sinuses and leading to a sinus headache. It usually is accompanied by a fever and can be diagnosed by symptoms, or the presence of puss viewed through a fiber-optic scope.

Common causes of inflammation include allergies, infections, or colds.

Treating a Sinus Headache

- Treatment is directed at decreasing the inflammation within the sinus passages, allowing them to drain and decreasing the pressure causing the headache. Antibiotics may not always be necessary.
- Home remedies to treat sinus symptoms are directed at helping the sinuses drain to help relieve pressure and inflammation. These include drinking plenty of fluid (to remain hydrated), humidification of air, warm compresses to the face and over-the-counter (OTC) pain medications.

REBOUND HEADACHES

Ironically, Rebound headaches are caused by regular, long-term use of medication to treat headaches, such as migraine. Pain relievers offer relief for occasional headaches, but if you take them more than a couple of days a week, they may trigger rebound headaches.

Culprits include over-the-counter medications like aspirin, acetaminophen (Tylenol), or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil), as well as prescription drugs.

One theory is that too much medication can cause the brain to shift into an excited state, triggering more headaches.

Treating Rebound Headache

- Usually, headaches will get easier to control when you stop taking the medicine or gradually take lower doses. Your doctor will probably ask you to record your headache symptoms, how often you have them, and how long they last.
- Some people may need to be "detoxified" with closer medical supervision, so it's important to work with a headache specialist. People who take large doses of sedative hypnotics, sedative-containing combination headache pills, or narcotics such as codeine or oxycodone may need to be in the hospital while they wean off of the drugs.
- After the first few weeks of the process, you may have more headaches, but eventually they should disappear.

MIGRAINE HEADACHES

Migraines can run in families and are diagnosed using certain criteria.

At least five previous episodes of headaches

- **Lasting between 4–72 hours**
- **At least two out of these four: one-sided pain, throbbing pain, moderate-to-severe pain, and pain that interferes with, is worsened by, or prohibits routine activity • At least one associated feature: nausea and/or vomiting, or, if those are not present, then sensitivity to light and sound**

A migraine may be foreshadowed by aura, such as visual distortions or hand numbness.

Migraine Triggers

The exact cause of migraines isn't known. However, there are numerous factors that are known to trigger the onset of migraine episodes. These include:

- Fluctuating hormone levels, especially among boys going through puberty, and women;
- Stress or anxiety;
- Fermented and pickled foods;
- Cured meats and aged cheeses;
- Certain fruits, including bananas, avocados, and citrus;
- Skipped meals;
- Too little or too much sleep;
- Bright or strong lights;
- Fluctuations in atmospheric pressure due to changing weather;
- Drinking alcohol;
- Caffeine withdrawal