

FAST FACTS: Headache

A headache is pain anywhere in the head or neck caused by disturbance of the pain-sensitive structures around the brain. There are over 200 types of headaches which can be a symptom of several different conditions with causes ranging from harmless to life-threatening. Description of the headache, together with neurological findings, determines the need for further investigations and the most appropriate treatment.



✓ Types of Headaches

- Primary Headaches occur on their own with no detectable underlying cause
 - Migraine- pulsating in character, affecting one side of head, associated with nausea, can be disabling in severity, lasting 3 hours to 3 days
 - Trigeminal Neuralgia- a shooting pain in face
 - Tension- band-like or squeezing, does not worsen with routine activity, may be brought on by stress
 - Cluster- severe pains that occur together in bouts
- Secondary Headaches are caused by an underlying condition or disease
 - Brain tumor
 - Stroke
 - Medication overuse
 - Head injury

✓ Red Flag Symptoms- should be reported to a Healthcare provider immediately

- Sudden onset, new or different headache in someone over 50
- Mental confusion and/or vision problems
- Headache made worse by exertion, coughing or straining
- Headaches in people with HIV, cancer or at risk for blood clot
- Headache with fever, vomiting, weakness, or neck stiffness

✓ Assessment is Key

- Treatment of a headache depends on the underlying cause.
- Not all headaches require medical attention, and most respond with simple over the counter (OTC) analgesics such as acetaminophen, or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as aspirin or ibuprofen.

✓ What You Can Do

- Immediately contact a medical provider to report Red Flag Symptoms noted above
- Use a [Pain Diary](#) to note important information useful to your Healthcare provider
- Try OTC analgesic if Red Flag Symptoms are not present