

FAST FACTS: Headache



A headache is pain in the head or neck. There are over 200 types of headaches which can be a symptom of many different conditions with causes ranging from harmless to life-threatening. Description of the headache along with other findings by a healthcare professional will determine 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; 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:** These 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 pain medications such as acetaminophen, or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as aspirin or ibuprofen

✓ **What Else You Should Do**

- Write down and share information about your pain with your healthcare provider
- Use a [Pain Diary](#) to note important information useful to the healthcare provider
- Try a non-drug treatment and document the impact on their pain in their Pain Diary

References:

1. WebMD. September 14, 2020. *Headache Basics*. Accessed 3.13.2022. <https://www.webmd.com/migraines-headaches/migraines-headaches-basics>
2. Cleveland Clinic. June 3, 2020. *Headaches*. Accessed 3.13.2022. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/9639-headaches>

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