

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 loved one's pain with their healthcare provider.
- Use a [Pain Diary](#) to note important information useful to the healthcare provider.
- Encourage your loved one to try a non-drug treatment and document the impact on their pain in their Pain Diary.

Revised January 2022

References

WebMD. September 14, 2020. Headache Basics. <https://www.webmd.com/migraines-headaches/migraines-headaches-basics>.

Cleveland Clinic. June 3, 2020. Headaches. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/9639-headaches>.