

When it's Not a Migraine

Understanding and Treating Headaches

Tension Headaches

There are two types of tension headaches—episodic and chronic. They differ in frequency and severity. Episodic headaches are random. Chronic headaches occur every day. They tend to be more severe. Both types may have the same symptoms. They include tightness in the neck, soreness, pressure or pulling sensations around the head. There also can be a dull, steady pain in the forehead, temples, or back of the head and/or neck. Depression, anxiety, stress and poor posture often go with tension headaches.

Sinus Headaches

These headaches result from sinus pressure in the forehead, behind the nose, or around the eyes and cheeks. Pressure can build up as a result of allergies, or a sinus infection following a cold or flu. When sinuses are blocked or inflamed, mucus can't drain. Then, headaches may occur. These headaches often feel worse first thing in the morning.

Cluster Headaches

Cluster headaches are known for their severity and intensity. The pain strikes with little warning. And, the attacks come in groups, or clusters. Headaches often last 30 to 45 minutes. And, most people suffer up to four a day during a cluster period. These headaches occur on one side of the head. They rarely switch sides between attacks. The pain usually begins as a stabbing sensation over one eye. It then moves to the forehead, temple and cheek on the same side of the face. Cluster headaches aren't hereditary. They seem to affect men more than women. Many sufferers are smokers. But, definite causes are unknown.

Treatment

See your doctor if you have frequent or severe headaches. Often, cluster headaches are treated with medication. For other types, your doctor also may recommend an over-the-counter pain reliever, lifestyle changes or other treatments. You may need counseling if your headaches come with depression or anxiety. Some techniques that you may want to try, but still are being studied, include:

- **Relaxation training.** Recognize the body's response to stress. You'll also learn how to reduce stress.
- **Progressive muscle relaxation.** Different muscle groups are tensed and then relaxed in a certain order.
- **Biofeedback.** The body's physical responses are monitored. This helps perfect relaxation techniques.

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