

Headache

WHAT IS IT?

An ache or pain in any area of the head. A headache can present by itself or with other symptoms. Pain can be sharp, throbbing, pressure-like on one or both sides of the head. It may be accompanied by nausea and/or vomiting, light or noise sensitivity. It can develop suddenly or gradually and last from hours to days. Headaches rarely halt daily activities.

WHAT CAUSES IT?

There are several types of headaches, including migraine, tension-like, cluster, sinus, and muscle contraction. Headaches can also be a symptom of other conditions, including but not limited to an upper respiratory infection, stress, dehydration or lack of sleep. Many headaches will improve with self-care. Not all headaches require medical evaluation.

WHEN TO SEEK EMERGENCY CARE

- Headache plus severe neck pain and stiffness with a fever $>100.4^{\circ}\text{F}$
- Headache plus severe nausea or vomiting and neurological changes, including difficulty speaking or moving.
- Worsening headache despite self-care
- Recent head injury or head trauma with worsening headache
- Worst headache in one's life

SELF CARE

Treatments for headaches may vary depending of the cause. Recommendations for self-care include:

- **Hydration** Drink 6-8 glasses of water daily. Avoid excess caffeine and alcohol, which can dehydrate.
- **Nutrition** Eat well-balanced regularly scheduled meals, especially breakfast.
- **Take an over-the-counter pain reliever.** Nonprescription products include ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin IB, others), naproxen (Aleve) and acetaminophen (Tylenol, others).
- **Get enough sleep.** It is recommended to get 7-8 hours of sleep per night.
- **Ice.** Using ice for 10-15 minutes can help relieve a headache.
- **Check your posture.** Poor posture and prolonged sitting can increase stress to muscles in the back and neck, which can lead to headaches.
- **Manage your stress level.** Take time for relaxation, mindfulness and exercise.

WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL CARE:

Headaches can be cared for at home, but make an appointment if you experience:

- Continued headache despite self-care
- Headaches that awaken you from sleep
- A change in headache pattern
- Other symptoms that concern you

The information presented here is not intended to be used for the diagnosis of a health problem or as a substitute for consulting a licensed medical professional. When using an Over-the-Counter medication please be sure to follow the package instructions.

Contact Health Services if you have any additional questions, concerns or to make an appointment.