



Headaches in Children and Adolescents

Patient information Leaflet

December 2019

Practical Headache Management Tips

- 1) Limit your use of medications to no more than two days per week.
- 2) Follow a regular schedule:
 - Don't skip meals, especially breakfast
 - Get at least 8 hours of sleep nightly
 - Exercise 30 minutes/day
 - Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water/day
 - Minimise stress
 - Learn to identify and avoid your headache "triggers."
 - Common triggers include caffeinated foods and beverages (chocolate, teas, colas, coffee), nitrates (luncheon meats, sausage/hot dogs, pepperoni), tyramine (aged cheeses, pizza, foods with artificial additives)
- 3) Here are some relaxation strategies:
 - Take a warm bath or shower; take a nap; or take a walk.
 - Ask someone to rub your neck and back.
 - Rest, sit or lie quietly in a cool, low-lit room. Close your eyes and try to release the tension in your back, neck and shoulders.

Red Flags

See your GP if:

- There is a change in character of the usual headaches
- Headaches regularly occur first thing in the morning with or without vomiting.
- Headaches persistently causing disturbed sleep.
- There are changes in personality or unexplained reduction in educational progress or activity levels.
- There is persistent headaches in child less than 4 years old.

Useful Contact: The Migraine Trust www.migrainetrust.org

Types of Headache

The two most common types are a tension headache and migraines.

Tension headaches

Can feel like a tightness or pressure around both sides of the head. They are usually not bad enough to stop children from doing daily activities or going to school.

Migraines

Can start off as a mild headache and then get worse throughout the day. They can be on one side of the head, or sometimes both sides. They can make children feel sick, cause them to vomit or be sensitive to light, sounds, smells. Some can get eye symptoms before a migraine starts, such as seeing funny spots or coloured lines. Migraines can be painful enough to stop children from doing their usual activities and can often run in families.

Some patients can have both tension-type headaches and migraine. It is important to realise that although these headaches come and go over a prolonged period of time and might impair your day-to-day function, they do not cause neurological damage. Much of the general advice for migraines also applies for tension headaches.

What causes headaches?

There is no single cause for headaches. They may be an inherited trait that runs in families. They may be caused by muscle tension or stress. The most common

sources of stress in children and adolescents include school, family, and friends. Some examples of stressors include:

- Not getting enough sleep
- Having high expectations from a 'straight-A student'
- Having problems with relationships at home
- Going to a new school
- Having a new brother or sister
- Having no close friends or having bad friends
- Being bullied
- Preparing for school tests or exams

How common are headaches?

Tension-type headaches affect 15 to 20% of adolescents and a lower percentage in younger children. The percent of adults who suffer with occasional tension headaches ranges from 30% to about 80%. Girls are twice as likely to suffer from tension-type headaches as boys.

How are headaches diagnosed?

The most important aspect of the headache evaluation is the headache history. The history includes asking patients to describe how they feel with the headache, what happens when a headache occurs, the frequency and duration of the headaches, and any associated symptoms experienced. A description of previous and current medications taken to treat the headaches is also an important part of the headache evaluation.

After completing the medical history part of the evaluation, your doctor will perform physical and neurological examinations. Usually, the results of these examinations are normal.

After evaluating the results of the headache history, physical and neurological examinations, your doctor will be able to determine what type of headache you have, whether or not a serious problem is present and if additional tests are needed. Often, no additional blood tests or scans are needed.

How are headaches treated?

Headaches are treated using simple analgesia (paracetamol or ibuprofen) and non-drug strategies. The **non-drug strategies are essential** as they tackle the root of the problem. These are lifestyle factors such as getting enough sleep, eating a balanced diet, keeping well hydrated, exercising regularly, reducing time watching TV/computer screens and wearing glasses if necessary.

Medications, such as paracetamol and ibuprofen can be used for occasional symptomatic relief. However, it is well recognised that overuse of these medications can cause analgesic rebound headaches and can contribute to the development of chronic daily headaches. That's why it's important to use **non-drug strategies** to reduce your headaches and medications only occasionally.

If you have any questions you want to ask, you can use this space below to remind you

If you have a visual impairment this leaflet can be made available in bigger print or on audiotape. If you require either of these options please contact the Patient Information Centre on 0161 922 5332

If you require an interpreter, please ask an appropriate person to contact our central booking office between Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm on 0161 922 6991 to arrange this for you.

語言翻譯及病者支持服務 (LIPS):

如果閣下需要翻譯員在您的預約當日幫助您的話 請找一名合適的家庭成員 0161 922 6991 聯絡本中央預約辦事處來您您安排 我們的辦公時間是星期一至星期五 上午 8 時至下午 5 時

Językowo Tłumaczeniowa Usługa Pomocy dla Pacjenta (Language, Interpretation and Patient Support Service LIPS):

Jeśli potrzebujesz pomocy tłumacza w trakcie swojej wizyty, proszę poprosić odpowiedniego członka rodziny o skontaktowanie się z Centralnym Biurem Zamówień (Central Booking Office), w celu zorganizowania tłumacza pomiędzy poniedziałkiem a piątkiem w godzinach od 08:00 - 17:00 pod numerem 0161 922 6991.

لینگویج، انٹریپریٹیشن اینڈ پیسٹنٹ سپورٹ سروس (Lips)

اگر آپ کو اپنی اپائنٹمنٹ کے لئے مترجم کی مدد کی ضرورت ہو تو براہ مہربانی اپنے خاندان کے کسی موزوں فرد سے کہیں کہ وہ ہمارے سنٹرل بنگ آفس سے پیر سے جمعہ 8.00 بجے صبح سے 5.00 بجے شام کے دوران 0161 922 6991 پر فون کر کے اس کا بندوبست کریں۔

Document control information

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Date Created: January 2017
Date reviewed December 2019