

Health Tips & News

Mental Health

Headaches

Everyone knows what it's like to get a headache. Often striking when we're feeling stressed, tired, or emotionally upset, the all-too-familiar throbbing pain and nagging pressure feel like they'll never go away. But there are ways to prevent and relieve headaches.

Make it stop!

When a headache strikes, it can feel like an eternity before it disappears. Don't stress out - if it's a tension headache, you'll just make it worse. **Try these methods instead for quick relief:**

- Take a warm shower (steam relieves sinus pain).
- Apply an ice pack for a maximum of 20 minutes at a time.
- Massage temples with your fingertips (better yet, get someone else to do it!).
- Place a cold, moist towel over your forehead while lying down.
- Take a walk (fresh air helps).
- Rest and take a nap.

Preventing headaches is better than treating them. We're often too quick to grab that bottle of painkillers. Here are some *non-drug* ways to avoid tension headaches:

- Avoid or eliminate the stressful situation.
- Get regular exercise.
- Get plenty of rest and sleep.
- Eat regular meals - skipping meals can cause headaches.
- Avoid excess caffeine and alcohol.
- Prevent eyestrain - don't work for long periods at the computer.
- Wear sunglasses - avoid squinting in the sun.

If you need to grab those pills, talk to your doctor or pharmacist to find the best one for you. There are a variety of headache medications to choose from. Remember to continue with the non-medication methods above to get the best results.

No matter what, if headaches get worse or become more frequent,

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Kids get them too

Yes, children can get headaches - more than a quarter of 12-to-13-year-olds experience headaches at least once a week in Canada. Before puberty (when hormones haven't yet kicked in), headaches are far more common in boys than girls.

Never ignore a child who comes to you complaining, "My head hurts." Pain can be triggered by certain factors such as food. If your child is prone to migraines or chronic headaches, here's a list of things you *shouldn't* buy at the grocery store:

- processed meats: hot dogs, sausages, and lunch meats (bologna, salami)
- caffeine products: cola drinks, caffeinated sodas, and coffee
- products that contain MSG (monosodium glutamate): frozen foods, canned meat, prepared sauces, bouillion, certain Chinese foods
- old or aged cheeses
- chocolate
- nuts
- figs
- sauerkraut
- aspartame

It may help to keep a "headache diary" with your child to record events surrounding the headaches. This way, you can figure out the root cause of the problem and take action to prevent future head pain. See a doctor if your child's headaches worsen or become more frequent.

If your child is experiencing a headache, try non-medication treatments first, like rest, fresh air, or putting a cold moist towel to the forehead. If you feel that medication is needed, ask your doctor or pharmacist to recommend the right medication and the right dose for your child. If at any time the headaches worsen or increase in frequency, make an appointment with your doctor.

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