

HEADACHE

Headaches: Treatment depends on your diagnosis and symptoms

Do you take aspirin or acetaminophen for all your headaches? For some types of headaches, that's not the best approach. Here's why.

Your head hurts. Again. The first step in foiling your frequent headaches is determining what type of headache you have. Sometimes headaches are a symptom of another disease or condition; sometimes there's no clear cause.

Take a close look at your headache signs and symptoms. Keeping a headache diary might help determine your headache type. Note when your headaches occur, your symptoms, and potential triggers, such as food, stress or changes in sleep.

There are many types and sub-types of headaches. Chronic daily headaches, which occur 15 days or more a month, are one sub-type. Tension-type headaches and migraines are also common sub-types of headaches. They can both be chronic, though they aren't always. Other types of chronic daily headaches include:

- **Hemicrania continua**, a one-sided headache that can feel like a migraine
- **Primary stabbing headaches**, which last for a few seconds and can occur several times throughout the day
- **Primary exertional headaches**, caused by exercise
- **Chronic paroxysmal hemicranias**, sharp, one-sided headaches that can cause tearing or a congested nose
- **Medication overuse headaches**, which occur from overusing pain medications for headaches for at least three months. These headaches occur at least 15 days out of the month.

Other headache types include:

- **Cluster headaches**, which cause severe pain on one side of the head and occur off and on for weeks over the course of a few months. Cluster headaches are associated with one or more signs and symptoms, such as tearing, nasal congestion and nasal discharge. These occur on the same side as the pain.

Tension-type headaches

Tension-type headaches, the most common variety of headaches:

- Might be felt as a tight band of pain around your head, a dull ache or pressure
- Might cause mild to moderate pain on both sides of the head
- Vary widely in frequency
 - Can be occasional
 - May occur more than 15 days a month (chronic)
- Last from 30 minutes to a week

Treatment

Most occasional tension-type headaches are easily treated with over-the-counter medications, including:

- Aspirin
- Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin IB, others)
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol, others)

Daily prescription medications, including tricyclic antidepressants, might manage chronic tension-type headaches. Alternative therapies aimed at stress reduction might help. They include:

- Cognitive behavioral therapy
- Biofeedback
- Massage therapy
- Acupuncture

Migraines

Migraines are another common type of headache. They affect three times more women than men. Migraines typically:

- Cause pain that is moderate to severe
- Pulsate
- Cause nausea, vomiting, or increased sensitivity to light or sound
- Affect only one side of your head, but can affect both sides
- Worsen with activity such as climbing steps
- Last from four to 72 hours without treatment

Treatment

Migraine treatment is aimed at relieving symptoms and preventing additional attacks. If you know what triggers your migraines, avoiding those triggers and learning how to manage them can help prevent migraines or lessen the pain. Treatment might include:

- Rest in a quiet, dark room
- Hot or cold compresses to your head or neck
- Massage and small amounts of caffeine
- Over-the-counter medications such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin IB, others), acetaminophen (Tylenol, others) and aspirin
- Prescription medications including triptans, such as sumatriptan (Imitrex) and zolmitriptan (Zomig)
- Preventive medications such as metoprolol (Lopressor), propranolol (Innopran, Inderal, others), amitriptyline, divalproex (Depakote), topiramate (Qudexy XR, Trokendi XR, Topamax) or erenumab-aooe (Aimovig)

Recognize emergency symptoms

Seek emergency care if you have:

- A very severe, sudden headache
- Headache after a head injury or fall
- Fever, stiff neck, rash, confusion, seizure, double vision, weakness, numbness or difficulty speaking
- Pain that worsens despite treatment

These symptoms suggest a more serious condition, so it's important to get a prompt diagnosis and treatment.

Take control

Almost everyone gets headaches, and many are nothing to worry about. But if headaches are disrupting your activities, work or personal life, it's time to see your doctor. Headaches can't always be prevented, but your doctor can help you manage the symptoms.

Headaches vary in frequency and severity of pain. Some people get headaches once or twice a year, while others get them more than 15 days a month. Some headaches may come back or last for several weeks. Pain can vary from mild to severe range, and it may be accompanied by symptoms like nausea or increased sensitivity to sound or light.

Without correct treatment, headaches may be severe and disturb daily activities. These complex conditions, that affect the individual in many aspects of everyday life, require a treatment plan that includes both preventive and acute therapies. The present pharmacological approach is crucial for treatment; however, non-pharmacologic therapies have gained popularity in recent years and need to be considered valid alternatives because they can be effective adjuncts or alternatives if needed.

Natural remedies for headaches

In addition to medications and other therapeutic techniques, there are various home remedies and lifestyle modifications that can help people manage headache symptoms. Below are several home remedies for the headache:

1. Consuming water

Research has shown that dehydration is a common cause of headaches, often resulting in symptoms like throbbing pain and fatigue. Studies indicate that increasing water intake can help reduce the frequency, duration, and severity of headaches in many individuals.

To prevent dehydration-related headaches, it's essential to stay well-hydrated by drinking plenty of water throughout the day and incorporating water-rich fruits and vegetables, such as cucumbers, oranges, and watermelon, into your diet. Maintaining hydration can be a simple yet effective strategy for headache prevention and relief.

2. Limiting Alcohol

Studies show that alcohol can trigger migraines in about one-third of those who frequently experience headaches. Alcohol is also a known risk factor for tension headaches and cluster headaches, which are among the most intense types.

Alcohol may contribute to headache onset through various mechanisms, including promoting inflammation, activating certain neuronal pathways, causing dehydration, and widening blood vessels, although the precise cause remains unclear.

3. Garlic

Garlic (*Allium sativum*) is known for its potential to effectively relieve headaches, regardless of their type, due to its natural analgesic (pain-relieving) properties. The active compounds in garlic are believed to gently penetrate the head region, providing relief by reducing pain and inflammation.

A common remedy involves crushing garlic cloves and boiling them in water to make a warm garlic tea, which enhances its therapeutic effects and can be especially beneficial when sipped slowly to alleviate headache discomfort.

4. Ginger

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) has analgesic (pain relieving) effects. This property makes it suitable for external application to the injured head region. This provides relief from the headache. Taking ginger supplements, usually in powdered form, can help relieve headache symptoms.

Combining ginger essential oil with the carrier oil and massaging it on the forehead, and back of the neck. Making ginger tea involves boiling fresh ginger slices in water. Chewing raw ginger or including it in meals can provide continuing relief because of its anti-inflammatory properties.

5. Clove

The strong pungent odour of clove (*Syzygium aromaticum*) has a headache-relieving effect. It calms nerves and restores peace. Adding two drops of clove oil, one tablespoon of coconut oil, and one spoon of salt and applying this mixture to the forehead to relieve headache pain. Taking one or two cloves each day can provide headache relief. Grinding a few cloves and keeping them in a clean handkerchief and inhaling the aroma if people have a headache.

6. Magnesium intake

Magnesium has been thoroughly studied for its possible benefits in the acute and prophylactic treatment of migraine. The ion influences a variety of parameters thought to be implicated in migraine pathophysiology, including neurogenic inflammatory, vascular, and oxidative stress systems. Multiple studies have indicated lower levels of serum magnesium in people suffering from migraines and tension headaches; therefore, supplementation with this ion may be useful. Magnesium therapy approaches change, with oral supplementation being the most common.

Magnesium-rich foods such as whole-grain flour, almonds, brown rice, oats, and pumpkin seeds need to be consumed more frequently in migraine cases. While there is no significant evidence of riboflavin deficit in migraine sufferers, multiple studies have revealed its potential benefits in migraine prevention

7. Consuming enough food

If individuals skip meals for a while, they may experience a headache due to low blood sugar. Eating something healthy right away can help alleviate the discomfort, while regular, balanced meals prevent these headaches from occurring. Consuming foods rich in magnesium, such as almonds, spinach, black beans, pumpkin seeds, and chia seeds, is especially beneficial, as magnesium is known to relax blood vessels and reduce headache frequency. Ensuring adequate nutrient intake and eating at regular intervals can be an effective way to keep headaches at bay.

8. Rice

Rice (*Oryza sativa*) is an ideal carbohydrate to consume when experiencing a headache, as it provides a gentle energy boost without causing digestive strain. In traditional remedies, the warm water left over after cooking rice, known as "kanji" should be consumed warm and mixed with a little bit of ghee. This combination is believed to soothe the digestive system, replenish lost fluids, and offer a calming effect, making it a comforting remedy for headache relief.

9. Milk

Milk and ghee can also reduce headaches. Cow's warm milk can be consumed to reduce headaches. Studies have shown that dairy product consumption, which is high in antioxidant vitamins and minerals, reduces migraine occurrence via anti-inflammatory mechanisms.

10. Sweets

Consuming a sweet treat or even a spoonful of sugar can sometimes help relieve headaches by quickly raising blood glucose levels, which may be beneficial if low blood sugar is a trigger. In India, it's common to offer "Jalebi" with warm milk as a traditional remedy to prevent morning headaches, believed to stabilize energy levels and provide quick relief. This combination is thought to be particularly helpful for people who may experience early-day headaches due to fasting or low blood sugar.

11. Betel leaves

Betel (*Piper betle*) leaves are valued for their analgesic (pain-relieving) and cooling properties, making them a popular natural remedy for headache relief. Chewing one or two fresh betel leaves can help alleviate pain, while grinding the leaves into a fine paste and applying it to the forehead offers a soothing, cooling effect that can further reduce headache discomfort. This traditional remedy is particularly useful for tension and sinus headaches, providing natural relief without side effects.

12. Feverfew

Feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium*), known in India by various local names such as carrot grass, congress grass, gajar ghas, and dhanura, is a traditional remedy used to prevent and relieve migraines. Its primary active compound, parthenolide—a sesquiterpene lactone—works by inhibiting the release of serotonin and reducing inflammation, both of which are linked to migraine onset.

Dried feverfew leaves can be chewed, or made into a tea for a gentler intake, offering natural migraine relief through these physiological processes.

13. Butterbur

Butterbur, derived from the leaves of *Petasites hybridus*, is recognized as an effective herbal supplement for the prevention of migraines in adults, as demonstrated by various studies. This plant contains active compounds that may reduce the frequency and severity of migraine attacks by inhibiting inflammatory pathways and stabilizing blood vessels.

Used as an herbal remedy, butterbur has gained popularity for migraine therapy and prevention, providing a natural alternative for those seeking relief from debilitating migraine symptoms. It is typically available in supplement form, making it easy to incorporate into daily routines for those who suffer from chronic migraines.

14. Lavender oil

Lavender oil (*Lavandula angustifolia* L., *Lamiaceae*) is well-known for its soothing and calming effects on the nervous system, making it a popular choice for headache relief. Its analgesic properties effectively alleviate headaches and migraines while also promoting relaxation and helping with insomnia.

Inhaling lavender essential oil is a safe and effective therapeutic option for acute migraine headaches, as it can reduce pain and anxiety associated with these episodes. Additionally, applying diluted lavender oil to the temples or using it in aromatherapy can enhance its calming effects, providing a holistic approach to headache management and overall well-being.

15. Peppermint oil

Peppermint oil (*Oleum menthae piperitae*), and eucalyptus oil (*Eucalyptus citriodora* Hook., family *Myrtaceae*) are both well-known for their healing properties. Essential oils are highly concentrated liquids that are containing aromatic components obtained from various kinds of plants. They have numerous medicinal effects and are most commonly applied topically; however, some can be consumed.

According to research, peppermint, and eucalyptus essential oils are very beneficial for headaches. If people have frequent headaches, applying a tiny amount of peppermint or lavender oil combined with a carrier oil, such as jojoba, on the wrists can help them reduce the headache.

16. Yoga

Headaches can be avoided and controlled with a variety of yogic approaches. Yoga and pranayama can reduce headache pain by relieving tension and stress. Regular Yoga movements, breathing techniques, and meditation can help to avoid or minimize the severity of persistent headaches.

Yoga postures such as suryanamaskar, bhujanga asana, sirsasana, pawan muktasana, shitali pranayama, savasana, kapalabhati, jalandhar banha, and kunjla jal neti are recommended for these conditions. Inverted postures promote oxygenation to the brain and minimize headaches. Neck exercises are essential for treating headaches. Yoga practice helps to develop flexibility, relax, and tone the muscles.

17. Head massage

Head massage, an ancient remedy in India, that involves applying oils to the neck, shoulders, scalp, and face to reduce headaches. Indian head massage headache treatment includes specific massage techniques such as squeezing, gently tapping, stroking, and pushing. The Indian head massage headache therapy works on acupressure points to reduce sinus congestion in individuals suffering from sinus headaches. It also increases blood circulation and enhances attentiveness.

Indian head massage for headaches is appropriate for people of all ages and genders. Only people with degenerative spinal illnesses, [osteoporosis](#), or [arthritis](#) should be restricted from receiving head massage therapy for headaches.

18. Having enough sleep

Insomnia, or sleeplessness, along with poor sleep quality, is closely linked to the occurrence of more frequent and severe headaches. Conditions like [sleep apnea](#), where breathing is periodically interrupted during sleep, are often associated with morning headaches due to disrupted rest. Similarly, inadequate sleep can heighten headache severity in individuals suffering from tension headaches, making the need for restorative sleep even more critical.

As a result, ensuring sufficient rest and improving sleep hygiene are essential strategies for those seeking natural headache prevention. By prioritizing sleep quality through practices like maintaining a consistent sleep schedule and creating a calming bedtime routine, individuals can significantly reduce the likelihood and intensity of headaches.

19. Applying cold compress

Applying a cold or ice compress to the neck or head can effectively reduce inflammation, inhibit nerve conduction, and narrow blood vessels, all of which contribute to headache pain relief. The cold temperature helps numb the area, providing soothing relief from throbbing sensations. To prepare a cold compress, simply fill a waterproof bag with ice, ensuring it is not too full to allow for flexibility, and cover it with a soft cloth to protect the skin.

For optimal headache relief, apply the compress to the back of the neck and the forehead, leaving it on for about 15 to 20 minutes. This method not only alleviates headache symptoms but can also promote relaxation, making it a practical, non-invasive remedy for those suffering from tension or migraine headaches.

20. Acupressure

Acupressure is an effective remedy for headache relief because it targets specific pressure areas that include

- **Union Valley (LI4):** Applying pressure to this spot between the thumb finger and index finger will help in relieving tension headaches.
- **Drilling Bamboo (UB2):** This region, located on the bridge of the nose between the brows, can be stimulated to reduce sinus pressure and eyestrain.
- **Gates of Consciousness (GB20):** Applying pressure to the Gates of Consciousness (GB20) located at the base of the skull may alleviate tension headaches.
- **Third Eye (Yin Tang):** Pressing the Third Eye (Yin Tang), located between the brows, can help ease tension and sinus problems.

While research on acupressure is limited, it has shown potential as an additional therapy for headache relief.

Tips to Prevent Headaches

If you're looking for ways to prevent headaches, consider the following evidence-based tips that may help:

- **Staying hydrated:** Maintaining hydration throughout the day is a simple yet effective way to reduce the risk of headaches while enhancing your overall health. Hydration needs can vary based on factors like activity level and body size, so pay attention to your thirst as a guide.
- **Identify Underlying Issues:** Frequent headaches may stem from various underlying causes, including nutrient deficiencies. If you experience regular headaches, consult a healthcare professional for a comprehensive checkup to identify any potential causes.
- **Eating Regularly:** Skipping meals or undereating can lead to headaches. Ensure you're consuming enough calories throughout the day, and try to avoid long periods without food to keep your energy levels stable.
- **Get a Quality Sleep:** Both sleep deprivation and oversleeping can trigger migraines. Aim for a balanced sleep schedule, targeting 7–9 hours of quality sleep each night to minimize headache risk.
- **Manage Your Stress:** Stress is a common trigger for certain types of headaches and can negatively impact overall health. Incorporating healthy stress management techniques such as exercise, meditation, and yoga into your routine can significantly reduce stress levels.

There are many additional strategies to help decrease the frequency, duration, and severity of headaches. Collaborating with a healthcare professional can help you develop a personalized plan that works best for you.

When to See a Doctor for Headaches

While an occasional mild headache is usually not a cause for concern, it's important to seek medical attention if you frequently experience headaches or if you have a severe headache that lasts a long time.

Headaches can sometimes indicate a serious underlying health issue, such as a tumor, blood clot, or other medical conditions that require prompt evaluation and treatment.

A healthcare professional / [general physician](#) / [neurologist](#) can help identify potential causes of your headaches and provide appropriate care and treatment. They may also conduct tests to rule out health conditions and nutrient deficiencies, such as B12 and iron deficiencies, which can contribute to or exacerbate headaches.

It's especially crucial to seek immediate medical attention if you develop a headache following an injury or trauma, such as a fall, or if you experience a sudden, extremely severe headache, as these could be signs of a serious medical condition.

What is a headache?

A headache is a pain in your head or face that's often described as a pressure that's throbbing, constant, sharp or dull. Headaches can differ greatly in regard to pain type, severity, location and frequency.

Headaches are a very common condition that most people will experience many times during their lives. They're the most common form of pain and are a major reason cited for days missed at work or school, as well as visits to healthcare providers.

While most headaches aren't dangerous, certain types can be a sign of a more serious condition.

What are the types of headaches?

There are more than 150 types of headaches. They fall into two main categories: primary and secondary headaches.

Primary headaches

Dysfunction or over-activity of pain-sensitive features in your head cause primary headaches. They're not a symptom of or caused by an underlying medical condition. Some people may have genes that make them more likely to develop primary headaches.

Types of primary headaches include:

- [Tension-type headaches](#) (most common type of headache).
- [Migraine headaches](#).
- [Cluster headaches](#).
- [New daily persistent headaches \(NDPH\)](#).

Some primary headaches can be triggered by lifestyle factors or situations, including:

- Alcohol, particularly [red wine](#).
- Certain foods, such as processed meats that contain nitrates ([food-triggered headaches](#)).
- Consuming nicotine ([nicotine headache](#)).
- Changes in sleep or lack of sleep.
- Poor posture.
- Physical activity, such as exercise ([exertion headaches](#)).
- Skipped meals ([hunger headache](#)).

- Coughing, sneezing, blowing your nose, straining (such as when having a bowel movement), or laughing or crying vigorously ([cough headaches](#)).

Primary headaches typically aren't dangerous, but they can be very painful and disrupt your day-to-day life.

Secondary headaches

An underlying medical condition causes secondary headaches. They're considered a symptom or sign of a condition.

Types of secondary headaches that aren't necessarily dangerous and resolve once the underlying condition is treated include:

- [Dehydration headache](#).
- [Sinus headaches](#).
- [Medication overuse headaches](#).

Types of secondary headaches that can be a sign of a serious or potentially life-threatening condition include:

[Spinal headaches](#): Spinal headaches are intense headaches that occur when spinal fluid leaks out of the membrane covering your spinal cord, usually after a [spinal tap](#). Most spinal headaches can be treated at home, but prolonged, untreated spinal headaches can cause life-threatening complications, including subdural hematoma and [seizures](#).

[Thunderclap headaches](#): A thunderclap headache is an extremely painful headache that comes on suddenly, like a clap of thunder. This type of headache reaches its most intense pain within one minute and lasts at least five minutes. While thunderclap headaches can sometimes be harmless, it's important to seek immediate medical attention. They can be a sign of:

- Head injury.
- Brain bleed.
- [Reversible cerebral vasoconstriction syndrome](#).
- A sudden, severe rise in blood pressure.

What's the difference between a headache and a migraine?

A migraine is a type of primary headache disorder.

A migraine is a common neurological condition that causes a variety of symptoms, most notably a throbbing headache on one side of your head. Migraines often get worse with physical activity, lights, sounds or smells. They usually last at least four hours or even days.

Who do headaches affect?

Anyone can have a headache, including [children](#), adolescents and adults. About 96% of people experience a headache at least once in their life.

About 40% of people across the world have tension-type headaches and about 10% have migraine headaches.

Symptoms and Causes

What is the main cause of a headache?

Headache pain results from signals interacting among your brain, blood vessels and surrounding nerves. During a headache, multiple mechanisms activate specific nerves that affect muscles and blood vessels. These nerves send pain signals to your brain, causing a headache.

Are headaches hereditary?

Headaches tend to run in families, especially migraines. Children who have migraines usually have at least one biological parent who also experiences them. In fact, kids whose parents have migraines are up to four times more likely to develop them.

Headaches can also be triggered by environmental factors shared in a family's household, such as:

- Eating certain foods or ingredients, like caffeine, alcohol, fermented foods, chocolate and cheese.
- Exposure to allergens.
- Secondhand smoke.
- Strong odors from household chemicals or perfumes.

What headache symptoms require immediate medical care?

If you or your child has any of these headache symptoms, get medical care right away:

- A sudden, new and severe headache.
- Headache with a fever, shortness of breath, stiff neck or rash.
- Headaches that occur after a head injury or accident.
- Getting a new type of headache after age 55.

Also seek medical care right away if your headache is associated with neurological symptoms, such as:

- Weakness.
- Dizziness.
- Sudden loss of balance or falling.
- Numbness or tingling.
- Paralysis.
- Speech difficulties.
- Mental confusion.
- Seizures.
- Personality changes/inappropriate behavior.
- Vision changes (blurry vision, double vision or blind spots).

Diagnosis and Tests

How are headaches evaluated and diagnosed?

If you have headaches often or if they're very severe, reach out to your healthcare provider.

It's important to diagnose headaches correctly so your provider can prescribe specific therapy to help you feel better. Your provider will complete a physical examination, discuss your medical history and talk to you about your headache symptoms. This conversation is part of a headache evaluation.

During the headache evaluation, your provider will ask you about your headache history, including:

- What the headaches feel like.
- How often the headaches happen.
- How long the headaches last each time.
- How much pain the headaches cause you.
- What foods, drinks or events trigger your headaches.
- How much caffeine you drink each day.
- What your stress level is.
- What your sleep habits are like.

Your headache can be more accurately diagnosed by knowing:

- When the headache started.
- Whether there's a single type of headache or multiple types of headaches.
- If physical activity aggravates the headache pain.
- Who else in your family has headaches.
- What symptoms, if any, occur between headaches.

After completing the medical history part of the evaluation, your provider may perform physical and neurological examinations. They'll look for signs and symptoms of an illness or condition that may be causing the headache, including:

- Fever.
- Infection.
- [High blood pressure](#).
- Muscle weakness, numbness or tingling.
- Excessive fatigue.
- Loss of consciousness.
- Balance problems and frequent falls.
- Vision problems (blurry vision, double vision, blind spots).

- Mental confusion or personality changes.
- Seizures.
- Dizziness.
- Nausea and vomiting.

Neurological tests focus on ruling out diseases that might also cause headaches. A disorder of your central nervous system might be suspected in the development of serious headaches.

After evaluating the results of your headache history, physical examination and neurological examination, your physician should be able to determine what type of headache you have, whether or not a serious problem is present and whether additional tests are needed.

If they're unsure of the cause, they may refer you to a headache specialist.

What tests will be done to diagnose headaches?

Although scans and other imagining tests can be important when ruling out other diseases, they don't help in diagnosing migraines, cluster or tension-type headaches.

But if your healthcare provider thinks that your headaches are being caused by another medical condition, there are several imaging tests they may order.

A [CT scan](#) or [MRI](#) can help determine if your headaches are connected to an issue with your central nervous system. Both of these tests produce cross-sectional images of your brain that can show any abnormal areas or problems.

Management and Treatment

How is a headache treated?

Treatment for headaches depends on the type.

One of the most crucial aspects of treating primary headaches is figuring out your triggers. Learning what those are — typically by keeping a headache log — can reduce the number of headaches you have.

Once you know your triggers, your healthcare provider can tailor treatment to you. For example, you may get headaches when you're tense or worried. Counseling and [stress management](#) techniques can help you handle this trigger better. By lowering your stress level, you can avoid stress-induced headaches.

Not every headache requires medication. A range of treatments is available. Depending on your headache type, frequency and cause, treatment options include:

- Stress management.
- Biofeedback.
- Medications.
- Treating the underlying medical condition/cause.

Stress management for headache

Stress management teaches you ways to cope with stressful situations. [Relaxation techniques](#) help manage stress. You use deep breathing, muscle relaxation, mental images and music to ease your tension.

Biofeedback for headache

[Biofeedback](#) teaches you to recognize when tension is building in your body. You learn how your body responds to stressful situations and ways to settle it down. During biofeedback, sensors are connected to your body. They monitor your involuntary physical responses to headaches, which include increases in:

- Breathing rate.
- Pulse.
- Heart rate.
- Temperature.
- Muscle tension.
- Brain activity.

Medications for headache

Occasional tension headaches usually respond well to [over-the-counter pain relievers](#). But be aware that using these medications too often can lead to long-term daily headaches (medication overuse headaches).

For frequent or severe headaches, your provider may recommend prescription [headache medications](#). [Triptans](#) and other types of drugs can stop a migraine attack. You take them at the first signs of an oncoming headache.

Drugs for high blood pressure, seizures and depression can sometimes prevent migraines. Your healthcare provider may recommend trying one of these medications to reduce headache frequency.

Treating the underlying medical condition causing secondary headache

Treatment for secondary headaches involves treating the underlying medical condition causing it.

For example, surgery is often needed to correct the underlying cause of secondary cough headache.

How can I get rid of a headache?

You can treat the occasional, mild headache at home with over-the-counter pain relievers. Other self-care treatments for headaches include:

- Applying heat or cold packs to your head.
- Doing stretching exercises.
- Massaging your head, neck or back.
- Resting in a dark and quiet room.
- Taking a walk.

Outlook / Prognosis

Can headaches or migraines be cured?

Treating health problems that cause headaches, such as high blood pressure, can eliminate head pain. Recently, there have been several new advancements in our understanding of what causes headaches.

Although researchers are closer than ever before to a cure, at this time, there isn't a cure for primary headaches. Treatment focuses on relieving symptoms and preventing future episodes.

Prevention

How can I prevent headaches?

The key to preventing headaches is figuring out what triggers them. Triggers are very specific to each person — what gives you a headache may not be a problem for others. Once you determine your triggers, you can avoid or minimize them.

For example, you may find that strong scents set you off. Avoiding perfumes and scented products can make a big difference in how many headaches you have. The same goes for other common triggers like troublesome foods, lack of sleep and poor posture.

Many people, however, aren't able to avoid triggers or are unable to identify triggers. In that case, a more personalized multidisciplinary approach with a headache specialist is often necessary.

Living With

When should I see my healthcare provider about headaches?

Contact your healthcare provider if you or your child has any of the following symptoms or situations:

- Experiencing one or more headaches per week.
- Experiencing headaches that keep getting worse and won't go away.
- Needing to take a pain reliever every day or almost every day for your headaches.
- Needing more than two to three doses of over-the-counter medications per week to relieve headache symptoms.
- Experiencing headaches that are triggered by exertion, coughing, bending or strenuous activity.
- Having a history of headaches but experiencing a recent change in your headache symptoms.