Proofed 11-16-09dlh

Proofed 12-19-07 ma

Headaches in adults: Symptom Checker

**DocID**

No DocID – not contained in FarCry

**Title**

Headaches

**Feature Title**

Headaches

**List Title**

Headaches

**Content is Contracted**

No

**Licensable**

No

**Searchable**

No

**Target pub date**

01/19/2010

**Review in months?**

24

**MCV Main tag**

**MCV Other tag(s)**

Content Packages > Symptom checker mobile > Adult > Head and neck

**MCV Related tag(s)**

**Primary Location**

Diseases and Conditions

**Tease**

Headaches are common and usually aren't the result of serious illness. Identify possible common causes based on symptoms you're experiencing.

**Abstract**

Find possible causes of headaches in adults. See our Symptom Checker.

**Benefit Summary**

**Editor**

Gregory Turosak

**Content Producer**

Jay Lenn

**Content Lead**

MayoClinic Com

**Product Lead**

**WPS**

Becky Hynes

**Medical Reviewers**

John Wilkinson, M.D.|Carl Anderson, M.D.

**Source**

**Keywords**

N/A

**SEO Title**

N/A

**SEO URL Keyword**

headaches

**SEO Description**

N/A

**Billboard**

**Billboard Large**

**Internal comments**

**Alternate Titles**

**FeatureID**

**Gender**

**Age**

Adult

**ENTER IN FARCRY:**

**When to get medical help** (1)

Get emergency medical care if your headache:

Is sudden and severe or the "worst headache ever"

Is accompanied by a fever, nausea or vomiting not related to a known illness

Is accompanied by stiff neck, rash, confusion, seizures, double vision, weakness, numbness or difficulty speaking

Follows a head injury, fall or bump

Get prompt medical care if your headache:

Gets worse despite rest and over-the-counter pain medication

Is new and you have a history of cancer or HIV/AIDS

**Self-care strategies** (1)

For occasional tension headaches, the following self-care strategies may provide relief:

Rest.

Take a warm shower, or use a warm pack on your neck.

Place a cool rag or ice pack on your forehead.

Gently massage or exercise your neck muscles.

Take an over-the-counter pain reliever, such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, others), naproxen (Aleve, others) or acetaminophen (Tylenol, others). Use only as directed on the label, and do not take combinations of pain relievers.

For recurrent headaches:

Keep a headache diary.

Avoid triggers.

Get enough sleep.

Exercise regularly.

For migraines, take action quickly. At the first sign of a migraine:

Take an over-the-counter pain reliever, or if you have a prescription pain reliever, take it as directed by your doctor.

Rest in a dark room.

Place a cool rag or ice pack on your forehead.

Drink a small amount of a caffeinated beverage.

**IMAGE**

Types of headaches IM04266

Caption: Different types of headaches cause different types of pain. The pain of tension headaches is usually a dull, squeezing pain that may involve the forehead, scalp, back of the neck and both sides of the head. The majority of migraines occur on one side of the head, but some people with migraines feel pain on both sides of the head. Cluster headaches usually occur on one side of the head, and some people describe the pain as a stabbing sensation in the eye.

**More Information**

Chronic daily headaches DS00646

Headaches: Self-care measures for headache relief HE00006

Headaches: Treatment depends on your symptoms HE00001

**END OF FARCRY TEXT**

Find possible causes of headaches based on specific factors. Check one or more factors on this page that apply to your symptom.

**Pain is**

Extreme

Mild to moderate

Moderate to severe

Pressure or squeezing sensation

Stabbing or burning

Throbbing

**Pain located**

Around face or forehead

Around one eye or radiates from one eye

Around your temples

On both sides of your head

On one side of your head

**Onset**

Is gradual

Is preceded by frequent use of pain medication

Is preceded by visual or other sensory disturbances

Is sudden

**Duration of headache is**

Less than a few minutes

Several hours to several days

Several minutes to a few hours

**Recurrence of headache**

Gradually becomes more frequent

Is daily

Is often the same time every day

**Triggered or worsened by**

Change in sleep patterns

Chewing

Clenching or grinding teeth

Everyday activities

Hormonal changes

Orgasm

Poor posture

Stress

Touching your face, eating or other facial movement

**Relieved by**

Lying down in the dark

Over-the-counter pain medication

Rest

**Accompanied by**

Achy joints or muscles

Change in personality, behaviors or mental status

Confusion

Difficulty speaking

Fever

Jaw pain

Nausea or vomiting

Persistent weakness or numbness

Restlessness or agitation

Runny or stuffy nose

Seizures

Sensitivity to light or noise

Stiff neck

Tender scalp

Vision problems

**Possible causes**

These diseases and conditions match at least one of the factors you selected. Those with the most matches are listed first.

DS00281 Brain tumor (2, p. 3; 3; 16)

Pain is moderate to severe

Onset is gradual

Recurrence of headache gradually becomes more frequent

Triggered or worsened by orgasm

Accompanied by change in personality, behaviors or mental status

Accompanied by confusion

Accompanied by difficulty speaking

Accompanied by nausea or vomiting

Accompanied by persistent weakness or numbness

Accompanied by vision problems

DS00487 Cluster headache (2, p. 2; 4, p. 196; 5)

Pain is extreme

Pain is stabbing or burning

Pain located around one eye or radiates from one eye

Onset is sudden

Duration of headache is several minutes to a few hours

Recurrence of headache is daily

Recurrence of headache is often the same time every day

Accompanied by nausea or vomiting

Accompanied by restlessness or agitation

Accompanied by runny or stuffy nose

Accompanied by sensitivity to light or noise

DS00226 Encephalitis (2, p. 3; 6)

Pain is moderate to severe

Onset is gradual

Relieved by over-the-counter pain medication

Relieved by rest

Accompanied by achy joints or muscles

Accompanied by change in personality, behaviors or mental status

Accompanied by confusion

Accompanied by fever

Accompanied by nausea or vomiting

Accompanied by persistent weakness or numbness

Accompanied by seizures

Accompanied by vision problems

DS00440 Giant cell arteritis (2, p. 3; 4, p. 197; 7)

Pain is mild to moderate

Pain is moderate to severe

Pain is throbbing

Pain located around your temples

Pain located on both sides of your head

Pain located on one side of your head

Onset is gradual

Triggered or worsened by chewing

Relieved by over-the-counter pain medication

Accompanied by achy joints or muscles

Accompanied by fever

Accompanied by jaw pain

Accompanied by tender scalp

Accompanied by vision problems

DS00118 Meningitis (2, p. 3; 8; 16)

Pain is moderate to severe

Onset is gradual

Relieved by over-the-counter pain medication

Relieved by rest

Accompanied by change in personality, behaviors or mental status

Accompanied by confusion

Accompanied by fever

Accompanied by nausea or vomiting

Accompanied by seizures

Accompanied by sensitivity to light or noise

Accompanied by stiff neck

DS00120 Migraine (2, p. 2; 4, p. 195; 9; 10; 16)

Pain is extreme

Pain is moderate to severe

Pain is throbbing

Pain located on both sides of your head

Pain located on one side of your head

Onset is gradual

Onset is preceded by visual or other sensory disturbances

Onset is sudden

Duration of headache is several hours to several days

Triggered or worsened by change in sleep patterns

Triggered or worsened by everyday activities

Triggered or worsened by hormonal changes

Triggered or worsened by stress

Relieved by lying down in the dark

Relieved by over-the-counter pain medication

Relieved by rest

Accompanied by nausea or vomiting

Accompanied by sensitivity to light or noise

DS00613 Rebound headaches (11, 16)

Pain is moderate to severe

Onset is preceded by frequent use of pain medication

Recurrence of headache is daily

DS00647 Sinus headaches (12)

Pain is moderate to severe

Pain is pressure or squeezing sensation

Pain is throbbing

Pain located around face or forehead

Relieved by over-the-counter pain medication

Relieved by rest

Accompanied by fever

Accompanied by runny or stuffy nose

DS00355 TMJ disorders (4, p. 197; 13)

Pain is moderate to severe

Pain located on both sides of your head

Pain located on one side of your head

Triggered or worsened by clenching or grinding teeth

Relieved by over-the-counter pain medication

Accompanied by jaw pain

DS00304 Tension headache (2, p. 2; 4, p. 194; 14)

Pain is mild to moderate

Pain is moderate to severe

Pain is pressure or squeezing sensation

Pain located on both sides of your head

Triggered or worsened by poor posture

Triggered or worsened by stress

Relieved by over-the-counter pain medication

DS00446 Trigeminal neuralgia (4, p. 198; 15)

Pain is extreme

Pain is stabbing or burning

Pain located around face or forehead

Duration of headache is less than a few minutes

Recurrence of headache gradually becomes more frequent

Triggered or worsened by touching your face, eating or other facial movement

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