

Tension-Type Headache (Acute)



Assess patient factors

Are any of the following present?

- Age ≤ 5 years **OR** Age > 50 years & 1st headache ever **OR** temporal tenderness
- Pregnant/postpartum with severe or new-onset or atypical headache
- Recent head or neck trauma
- New-onset headache or atypical headache in patient with decreased immune function (e.g., HIV) or Lyme Disease
- History of brain cancer or any active cancer
- Suspected medication overuse headache
- In children and adolescents – Parents do not experience headaches (lack of family history)

YES

REFER

NO

Assess for red flag symptoms

Are any of the following present?

- Worst headache ever
- Concurrent fever with neck stiffness
- Thunderclap onset (seconds to 1 minute)
- Atypical headache severity/ pattern/ frequency
- Cognitive change, impaired consciousness, personality, or mental health status change (i.e., psychiatric disorder)
- Changes in vision
- Neurological symptoms (e.g., changes in speech, consciousness; weakness/sensation/tremors)
- Occurs with exertion, change in position, or cough
- Concurrent pain near herpetic eruption
- Concurrent facial pain, jaw pain/locking/clicking, inability to chew properly

YES

NO

Are any of the following present?

- Headache associated with infection (e.g., sinus infection, dental abscess, acute otitis media)
- Recent change to medications or substances that may cause withdrawal
- Drug-induced adverse reaction
- Prodrome, aura or postdrome (suspect migraine)
- Rapid onset of severe unilateral, orbital/supraorbital/temporal pain (suspect cluster headache)

YES

Other Intervention
± Symptomatic
support ± Refer

NO

Are symptoms of current headache typical of a tension-type headache?

No nausea/vomiting; ≤ 1 of photo/phonophobia & ≥ 2 of: Mild to moderate intensity; pressing/tightening feeling (non-pulsating pain); not aggravated by regular physical activity; Bilateral

No

Yes

Is severe liver impairment or active liver disease present?

Yes

Nonpharmacologic
management

No

