

Headache

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It is reported that 90% of all people have experienced a headache and that 10 million visits to health care professionals each year occur because of headaches. There are four different types of headaches:

1. Tension headache
2. Migraine headache
3. Cluster headache
4. Sinus headache

The majority of people suffer what are called *tension headaches*. They are often caused by a lack of sleep, fatigue, hunger, depression and too much sun; they are triggered by stress and anxiety with pain felt all over the head. Fortunately, they usually respond to over-the-counter medications like Excedrin or Tylenol. A person must be still and take time to be aware to be able to "manage" these headaches; if you are aware of what triggers these headaches you can help prevent them. When we become stressed we often tense our shoulders and/or grind our teeth or jaw and don't even realize it, so take a few minutes to relax your neck muscles. Take some slow, deep breaths into your nose and blow it out slowly. Relax your shoulders by pulling them up to your ears and then let them drop. Also make sure to get enough sleep, and take time away "just for yourself" and exercise. If a headache is already present, before taking medication you can try these remedies for a tension headache: 1) take a warm bath or shower, 2) take a nap, 3) put a hot or cold pack on your head, 4) take yourself away from the situation that may be causing the headache.

The second common type of headache is the *migraine headache*. This affects over 28 million Americans, women four times more than men, and 1 in every 4 households. The brain's blood vessels constrict or tighten, this slows the blood flow to the brain, which lessens the oxygen to the brain, the arteries dilate or open up and this produces the pain. Migraine headaches can be triggered by: stress, emotional distress, schedule changes, hormonal changes, fatigue, weather changes, glare, and dehydration. There are also certain foods that can "trigger" a migraine headache, including aged cheese, coffee/caffeine, nicotine, red wine, chocolate, Asian foods with MSG, and nitrates, commonly found in hot dogs and bacon. Migraines are usually experienced in one side of the head, and feel like a throbbing intense pain that is moderate to severe especially near the eye of the affected side. Migraine headaches can cause nausea and vomiting and can make a person extremely sensitive to noise and lights. Often, a person will experience an "aura" just prior to their migraine headache which can consist of flashing lights, seeing spots or zigzag lines, and can last as long as 10-40 minutes. Migraine headaches are thought to be inherited, and often need to be managed by taking medication.

Cluster headaches are the third type of headache; these occur again and again and are more common in men. They usually consist of a sharp, shooting pain near the eye or temple. A person experiencing these headaches may pace, fidget and be unable to keep still. They may also have a stuffy, runny nose, drooping eyelid, and/ or red and tearing eyes. These headaches usually last 15 minutes to 3 hours, commonly occur among 20-40 year olds, DO NOT run in families, and are NOT life threatening. They can be triggered by alcohol, strong smells/perfumes, and heat. If these occur often and disrupt your life, you should seek medical treatment.

Finally, the *sinus headache* is the last headache to be discussed. If you have ever experienced a sinus headache, OUCH! A sudden move of the head or bending over is enough to bring the strongest person to his/her knees. Inflammation and pressure of the sinus cavities may cause constant pain in the forehead, cheekbones, and across the nose. Fortunately, sinus headaches can be treated with decongestants and pain-killers that can be obtained without a prescription. Contact your doctor if your symptoms persist, you may have an infection that needs an antibiotic.

There are two goals when treating any type of headache. First, relieve the pain and then prevent future attacks. You can minimize or avoid the causes or triggers of your headaches as a treatment plan, or use the relaxation techniques discussed. You may also need medication, but make sure to give the medications a few weeks to work, as they take time.

The National Headache Foundation suggests that you call your health care provider and schedule an appointment if you have any of these symptoms:

- 1) Do you have several headaches per month, with each lasting several hours?
- 2) Do your headaches disrupt your home, work, or school life?
- 3) Do you have nausea, vomiting, vision or other sensory problems?

Please know that God doesn't want us to suffer unnecessarily and wants us to have a happy, healthy and productive life, therefore, if you answered YES to any of the above questions, you need to take a moment out of your hectic schedule and think about what you need to do for yourself, your health and your well-being. The good news is that once a correct headache diagnosis is made, an effective treatment plan can be started.