

Pain Solutions

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Headaches



What are the types of headaches?

Headaches are usually classified into several broad categories including:

- muscle contraction or tension headaches
- vascular or migraine headaches
- cluster headaches

Tension Headache

A tension headache usually affects both sides of the head. It often involves the temple and eye region and possibly the neck. This type of headache evolves over a period of hours, can last days, and tends to remain constant. Sleep disturbance is common with a tension headache.

Females are more likely to suffer from tension headaches. There is no heredity pattern or visual disturbance, such as spots in a field of vision, involved with a tension headache.

Some tension headache triggers include:

- physical and psychological stress
- unreasonable work deadlines
- sitting too long in front of a computer or workstation
- neck injury such as whiplash

Migraine Headache

Many people who suffer from migraines as an adult had experiences with migraines as children. These types of headaches are usually one-sided and give off a throbbing or pounding pain. The pain generally settles behind one eye and may occur frequently or sporadically. Victims are more often female and have a strong family history of migraines. Attacks typically last for 4-24 hours. Symptoms include: nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, light or sound sensitivity and possible aura presence (visual illusions only seen by the patient).

Cluster Headache

Cluster headaches are the least common type of headache, but are also the most severe. The pain is intense and is described as a burning or piercing quality that is throbbing or constant. The pain from these headaches is so severe that often the sufferer cannot sit still. The pain is located behind one eye, or in the eye region, and typically does not change sides. Attacks normally occur 1-3 times

per day over the course of weeks or months. This time period is called a cluster. A cluster period may disappear for months, or years, only to return.

What can cause headaches?

- Changes in diet or sleep
- Fatigue
- Hormones & oral contraceptives
- Stress
- Nitrates (hot dogs and bacon)
- Bright sunlight
- MSG (found in Chinese food)
- Alcohol
- Strong odors (especially perfume)
- Foods that contain Tyramine (cheese and red wine)

What treatment options are available?

Treatment must be initiated at the first indication of a headache for it to be effective. A variety of drugs are used to treat headaches including:

- Midrin® or Imitrex®
- Intravenous lidocaine
- Antidepressants
- Anti-nausea medications
- Beta-blockers
- Calcium channel blockers

If medications do not work, other options include:

- Nerve blocks
- Botox injections
- Oxygen therapy
- Biofeedback

How can a Pain Specialist help my headache?

Pain specialists take into consideration the frequency and severity of the headache, results of previous therapy and diagnostic tests, previous drug use, along with any other diseases that might affect treatment choices. If headaches are relatively infrequent, the implementation of stress management and a trial of analgesics (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) are usually successful.

Frequent headaches are often treated with antidepressants. Some patients require further assistance in breaking the pain cycle, such as biofeedback (a technique in which patients use auditory signals to control stress levels), cervical epidural steroid injections, other drug regimens and psychotherapy.

