

Headache Highlights

Headaches occur in young and old alike, including very young children and babies, and can range from mild annoyance to severe, life-altering pain. Most headaches fall under a specific type or category.

Tension-type headaches are the most common and are sometimes referred to as “stress headaches” and are either *episodic* or *chronic*. *Episodic* headaches generally occur randomly and are often the result of temporary stress, anxiety, fatigue or anger. Symptoms include soreness in the temple, a vice-like ache around your head, a pulling feeling, pressure sensations, and contracting head and neck muscles. Normally, an over-the-counter medication can bring relief in an hour or two. If tension headaches persist for more than 15 days per month, it can be considered chronic. *Chronic tension* headaches may be the result of stress and fatigue, but can also be attributed to physical problems, psychological issues, or depression.

Migraines are another type of headache and can range from a mild to severe throbbing or pounding pain. While the exact cause of migraines is unknown, the pain produced by this type of headache is related to the contraction of blood vessels and other changes inside the brain. Physical or environmental triggers for migraines can be stress, fatigue, oversleeping or a lack of sleep, fasting or missing a meal, certain foods or medications, caffeine, chocolate, alcohol, menses, hormonal changes, and even changes in barometric pressure and altitude. Migraines may be accompanied with a visual disturbance, which is known as an aura.

Other headache types include, but are not limited to:

- *Sinus*: occur when sinuses cavities (located behind

your forehead, cheek, and bridge of your nose bones) become filled with mucus that does not drain properly, which produces a localized pain.

- *Cluster*: occur in clusters or groups, usually 1 to 4 in a single day.
- *Organic*: occur as a result of an abnormality in the brain or skull. Medical tests are needed to diagnose organic headaches.
- *Rebound*: Over-use of medications can precipitate a “rebound” into another headache, especially if the medication contains caffeine. If you are also drinking caffeine, you may become more vulnerable to this type of headache.

Seek medical attention if:

- Your headaches—the pain and duration—have gotten worse over days and weeks.
- You—particularly if you are over age 50—have never had headaches before and these came on suddenly.
- You are feeling weak, experiencing numbness or a change in your hearing or sight.
- Your headache is unrelenting, and none of the over-the-counter analgesics seem to relieve the pain.
- Your memory, personality or cognitive abilities seem to be changing.
- Your headache is accompanied by a stiff neck, rash, nausea, vomiting, fever, breathing problems, or follows a head injury.

Resources: http://www.headaches.org/educational_modules/completeguide/differenttypes.html

To speak with an EAP professional, please call: **800.327.2384**

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