

Health Tips

from New London Hospital

Headaches & Migraines

Headaches are very common! It is normal to have at least one headache a year. A headache occurs outside of the skull in the nerves, blood vessels, and muscles covering the head and neck. Muscles and blood vessels can swell, change, or tighten, and stimulate or put pressure on the surrounding nerves. You can experience a headache when these nerves send pain messages to the brain.



Dr. Lori Richer

Some causes of headaches include: certain medications; changes in sleep patterns; heredity; missed meals; dehydration; stress; minor head injury; hormone changes; smoking; too much caffeine; poor posture; over use of computer or TV; listening to loud sounds; smelling strong odors; and certain foods or beverages.

Two common types of headaches are tension headaches and migraines.

Tension headaches are caused by tension in the muscles of the neck and head, which is caused by emotional or physical stressors. They can last a few minutes or up to a day. Symptoms include constant pressure in the front, top, or sides of the head, constricting feeling, and dull or aching pain.

Migraines are triggered by stressors such as stress, sleep deprivation, and certain foods or beverages. They can last 30 minutes to 6 hours or sometimes even a few days. Prior to a migraine, some people experience auras, which may be blurred vision, seeing spots, flashing lights or jagged lines, or smelling a certain odor. Symptoms of migraines include: pounding; throbbing pain on one or both sides of the head; dizziness; stomachaches; nausea or vomiting; seeing spots or halos around lights; and sensitivity to light, noise, and/or smells.

Treatment of tension headaches can be performed at home. Take an over-the-counter pain reliever, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin). Because headaches can impair stability, it is best to lie down in a cool, quiet, dark room and place a cool, moist cloth across your forehead or eyes. Try to relax and breathe easily and deeply.

If your headaches and/or migraines are constant and/or frequent, consult your doctor. Your doctor will diagnosis your headaches through Q&As of your medical history and some physical exams may be performed. You may be prescribed a prescription to help decrease your headaches, or your doctor may prescribe pain management. Pain management consists of learning ways to prevent your headaches through activities such as stress reduction techniques, relaxation, and cutting down on possible triggers, such as caffeine.

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