

## A Guide to Non-migraine Headaches

### ■ Tension Headache

This is the most common type of headache, affecting 90 percent of American adults and occurring in more women than men. Sufferers describe the condition as a band steadily tightening around their head. There also may be pain in the back of the neck or base of their skull. Tension headaches can last 30 minutes to a week. If they occur more than 15 times a month, they're considered chronic. The pain can be severe and distracting, but rarely affects your ability to function like a migraine does.

**Triggers and causes** – Tension headaches occur when muscles in the face, neck, scalp and jaw tighten up. The word “tension” is misleading because that's not the only cause of these headaches—stress, poor posture and depression also can bring them on. (So, don't put off treatment under the assumption that when the tension goes away, the headache will, too!) Another cause, ironically, can be the very pain relievers you're taking to stave off the headache. If you take these drugs every day, your body can become dependent on them. When you miss a day, your head begins to hurt—a symptom of medication withdrawal.

**Treatments and prevention** – Rest, ice packs, warm compresses or a hot shower can relieve an occasional tension headache. Severe headaches can be treated with aspirin, acetaminophen and muscle relaxants. Your doctor also may prescribe therapy such as muscle relaxation and stress reduction techniques, after evaluating your lifestyle to determine the cause of your headaches.

### ■ Cluster Headache

Cluster headaches are relatively uncommon, but you'll know if you have one. A cluster headache begins with stabbing pain on one side of the head, usually starting at the eye. Eighty-five percent of sufferers are men. Symptoms include an intense burning or stabbing sensation, bloodshot or teary eye, runny nose, and a flushed and sweaty face. Cluster headaches last less than 45 minutes and can occur daily for weeks or months before subsiding.



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**Triggers and causes** – Researchers haven't yet determined the exact cause of cluster headaches. They believe histamines, which dilate or expand blood vessels, trigger the condition, because of the increased levels of histamine in the blood and urine of cluster headache patients. Alcohol also is a potential trigger, and many people who get cluster headaches are heavy smokers.

**Treatment and prevention** – Cluster headaches can be treated with medications (such as triptans) similar to those prescribed for migraines. Breathing 100 percent oxygen during a severe headache is helpful to some patients.

### ■ Sinus Headache

Sinus headaches usually are accompanied by pain or pressure in the forehead or around the eyes and cheeks, and the skin and bones around the eyes feel tender. The pain gets worse when you bend down, quickly moving your head while exercising, or blow your nose.

**Triggers and causes** – A sinus headache occurs when sinuses are congested. Sinuses are cavities in the head, connected to the face through small openings. The sinus lining normally produces mucus, which drains through these small openings to the nose. When you have a cold or allergy, the openings are blocked by excess mucus or swollen tissue, and this can cause an infection—and headache. When the sinuses are clear, the headache will subside.

**Treatment and prevention** – Aspirin, acetaminophen or ibuprofen may temporarily relieve the pain of a sinus headache. See your doctor if headaches persist. He or she may prescribe decongestants or an antibiotic if you have a sinus infection.



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