

Managing Headaches

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Throbbing, pounding, aching head pain...sound familiar? Many of us get headaches. Some people have headaches only occasionally, while others experience them more often. Headaches can have many causes and levels of severity too. If you experience headaches frequently or have difficulty managing them, speak with your healthcare provider. For many people, headaches can be managed effectively with lifestyle changes and medications.

What Kind of Headache is it?

In order to properly treat a headache, it's important to know the type of headache you suffer from. Keep in mind that there are many [different types of headache](#), some of which include: migraine, tension, cluster, sinus and rebound (also called medication overuse). Keeping track of your headache pain and other symptoms with a [headache diary](#) can help you and your healthcare provider determine the headache you get and find a headache treatment that best fits your needs.

Managing Your Headaches

Headache treatment can vary depending on the frequency, severity, and symptoms of your headache. Most headaches can be managed with the use of over-the-counter medications.

Taking a medicine when you have a migraine headache to relieve the pain is called “acute” treatment. Some people who have more frequent or severe migraine headaches may need to take medication on a regular basis to prevent them in the future—this type of treatment is called “preventive” treatment.

Practicing some lifestyle habits may also help you manage migraine and other headache conditions. Massage, meditation, neck stretches, lying down in a dark and quiet room, and/or using a hot or cold compress on the head and neck are some ways that have been shown to help reduce headache pain. Here are a few other helpful tips to consider:

- **Know your triggers.** It’s important to know whether your headaches are triggered or worsened by eating certain foods (e.g., wine, aged cheese, foods high in MSG) or from stress or other causes, so you can avoid them. A headache diary can help you track what those triggers are.
- **Stay hydrated.** Drink plenty of water every day, as dehydration can trigger and/or worsen headache pain.
- **Eat regularly.** Skipping meals may worsen or cause headaches.
- Stay consistent with your sleep habits. Too little or too much sleep can trigger headaches.
- **Exercise.** Try to get 30 minutes of exercise on most days of the week. Be sure to check with your healthcare provider before starting a new exercise regimen.
- **Lower stress.** Curb your stress with physical activity, meditation or massage.
- Stop smoking (if you smoke). Nicotine can bring on or worsen a headache.
- **Watch your caffeine intake.** Excess amounts of caffeine from coffee, tea, medicines containing caffeine, etc., can worsen your headache or trigger a type of headache called [medication overuse headache](#). Caffeine withdrawal can also cause headaches.
- **Stick with your headache treatment plan.** Take medications exactly as your healthcare provider directed, and don’t take any prescription medicine that was not prescribed for you.

Working with Your Healthcare Team

Your headaches may be disruptive, but the good news is that for most people, headaches are treatable. And keep in mind that your healthcare provider is the best source of information for your questions and concerns about managing them.

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[\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[5\]](#) [\[6\]](#) [\[7\]](#)

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