



Do you suffer from Headaches? - November/Dec 2011

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Headaches

Most of us have experienced some form of headache throughout our lives and most headaches prove to be entirely harmless and are best treated with ordinary painkillers. Sometimes though there is an underlying health reason and all headaches should be referred to the doctor if they are experienced over a period of time or extremely acute.

Acute single headaches

Causes:

Headaches are a common feature of any **infectious disease** which raises the body temperature, such as, 'flu or a chest infection. Sometimes an infection within your sinus cavities in the face develops with a common cold, and this is generally accompanied by headache.

Hangover from Alcohol

Ethanol (the type of alcohol in beer, wine, and spirits) has an effect on the blood vessels in the brains. Dilation of the blood vessels in the brain may cause headaches and alcohol is considered to be a trigger. Dehydration due to excessive amounts of alcohol contributes to headaches.

After a **head injury** you may develop a headache, this should always be checked in case of a blood clot forming.

Aneurysms - usually caused by a ruptured arterial blood vessel within the brain.

Meningitis is an inflammation of the meninges (the protective membranes that cover the brain and spinal cord) caused by an infection. Headache of meningitis starts more slowly in someone who is clearly unwell with a high temperature.

Recurring Headaches:

- Cluster
- Tension
- Trigeminal neuralgia
- Sensitivity to certain types of foods
- Medication
- Brain tumours
- Migraine

Cluster headache. The pain in this type of headache is shorter and much more severe. It is less often accompanied by any serious feelings of nausea and hardly ever by the visual disturbances linked with migraine, but many people find that the eye waters or becomes bloodshot, or that the eyelid droops on the same side as the headache.

Tension-type headache. Here the pain usually affects both sides of the head at once, it is not accompanied by nausea or any other symptoms and it wears off after one to six hours. This type of headache is common and most people realize it is harmless and take ordinary painkillers.

Trigeminal nerve, this nerve supplies the face, can sometimes produce neuralgia, most commonly affecting the face or teeth. The pain is short-lived, and has been compared to a red-hot knitting needle being thrust through the face. It can be triggered by chewing, eating, speaking or being in drafts.

Coughing, straining and exertion

Coughing, straining, lifting heavy weights or running may cause headaches always consult your doctor.

Medication

Some medications can cause headaches/or are side effects of some drugs.

Brain tumors

Are rare and are generally associated with other complications such as weakness in an arm and/or leg, difficulty with vision to one side, speech problems or a personality change.

Neck disease

Wear and tear on the joints of the neck can sometimes cause headache.

Dull headache increasing in severity over days and weeks need also to be checked out and in most cases are generally harmless.

Migraine

A migraine is an intense headache accompanied by other symptoms such as nausea (feeling sick), visual problems and an increased sensitivity to light or sound. Generally lasts for a few hours but can last for many days. Some people experience migraines several times a month and others only occasionally, commonly experienced in women. Although migraines tend not to be life threatening they can seriously have an impact on the quality of people's lives.

Two main types of Migraine:

1. Migraine without aura (common migraine)

Some headache sufferers get migraine and tension type headache - it is important to recognise that both types of headache are occurring so they can be managed appropriately.

2. Migraine with aura (classical Migraine).

An aura is a warning sign that a migraine is about to happen. People commonly experience an aura between 20 minutes and one hour before the headache stage of their migraine.

Main symptoms of Migraine

The main symptoms of migraine are an intense, throbbing or pounding headache often affecting the front or one side of the head, nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting (being sick), and an increased sensitivity to light and sound. The throbbing headache is often made worse by the person moving their head and it is common for people to feel tired for up to two or three days after a migraine.

Other symptoms:

- Visual problems such as blurred vision (difficulty focusing),
- Blind spots,
- Flashes of light, or a zigzag patterns
- Tingling sensations (pins and needles) in the face, lips and tongue, or in the arms and legs
- Speech problems such as slurred speech
- Dizziness
- Stiff neck
- Sweating
- Poor concentration
- Stomach ache
- Diarrhea

What causes Migraine?

Exact cause of migraine is unknown, for all migraine attacks, there appears to be a change in the blood vessels in the brain. However, the exact causes of migraine are likely to be more complicated than problems with the blood vessels.

- **Women** are more than twice as likely as men to experience migraines, possibly due to hormonal factors. Women might find that they experience a migraine just before, or just after, the start of their period. For others it could be the oral contraception (**the pill**), the menopause, or that hormone replacement therapy (**HRT**)
- **Emotional triggers** such as - Stress, anxiety, anger, excitement
- **Physical triggers** - Tiredness, lack of sleep, irregular sleep, tension in neck or shoulders, eyestrain or dental problems (grinding).
- **Dietary triggers** - dieting, irregular eating, dehydration, alcohol, caffeine, certain foods (chocolate, cheese, citrus fruits, food additives - MSG, aspartame (sweeteners)
- **Environmental triggers** - Bright lights and loud noises or smoking environments.

Treatments for migraine

Most people find that lying down in a quiet, dark room is helpful. Sleeping (if you are able) can also help. Some people find that their symptoms die down after they have vomited (been sick).

Pain-relief medication like Paracetamol, aspirin and anti-inflammatory drugs like ibuprofen (Nurofen) are effective, especially if taken at the very first signs of an attack.

Your GP can prescribe if over-the-counter medication doesn't help. If your situation does not improve after treatment, you might be referred to a specialist migraine clinic.

How can I prevent migraines?

- One of the best ways to prevent migraines is to try to avoid the things that might trigger your attacks. Most people benefit from trying to get enough sleep, eating regular meals, drinking plenty of water to keep hydrated, and trying to avoid stress.
- Eat regularly 3 meals a day, with small, nutritious snacks between meals if needed, this will help to stabilize blood sugar that may precipitate a migraine. Do not skip meals Nutrihealing
- Get tested for any allergies to food and eliminate them from your diet Genova Diagnostics
- Keeping a diary of your migraines to record when and where you experience attacks, check for any patterns, and try to identify your triggers.
- Explore any emotional links using – **Hypnotherapy**

If you experience frequent migraines, you might be prescribed medication to help prevent attacks. Your GP will discuss the preventative medication options with you.