

## Headaches

**The two most common types are:**

- **Tension headaches** – Tension headaches cause pressure or tightness on both sides of the head.
- **Migraine headaches** – Migraine headaches often start off mild and then get worse. They often affect just one side of the head. They can cause nausea or vomiting, or make you sensitive to light and sound.

**Is there anything I can do to feel better when I have a headache?** — Yes. Some people feel better if they:

- Lie down in a cool, dark, quiet room (this works best for migraine headaches)
- Take non-prescription pain medicines (but check with a health care provider before taking any new medicines if you have a health condition or already take prescription medicines)
  - Taking ibuprofen (Advil) or naproxen (Aleve) to reduce inflammation and break the pain spasm cycle may be helpful. (Follow label directions, unless instructed otherwise)
  - If you find you need to take medication daily it is a good idea to be evaluated by a health care provider. Taking non-prescription pain medication too often can actually cause more headaches later.
- Following the **relaxation technique** below may help:
  - Lie down on your back, or sit in a comfortable chair. Close your eyes.
  - Breathe in slowly for a count of two and then out for a count of two. Keep breathing in this slow rhythm.
    - Tense and relax the following parts of your body, holding each tensed part for 6 seconds, then slowly let it relax for 15 to 20 seconds, before going on to the next body part.
    - Tense your right hand by making a fist. Hold it. Then relax.
    - Tense and relax your right upper arm by bending it at the elbow and bringing your hand up to your shoulder.
    - Do the same with your left hand. Then your upper left arm.
    - Now your shoulders—lift them up toward your ears.
    - Tense and relax your neck by pushing your head back, then again by bringing your chin down toward your chest.
  - Continue slow, rhythmic breathing until 10 minutes are up.

**Is there anything I can do to keep from getting headaches?** — Yes. Some people find that their headaches are triggered by certain foods or things they do. To keep from getting headaches in the future, you can keep a “headache diary.” In the diary, write down every time you have a headache and what you ate and did before it started. That way you can find out if there is anything you should avoid eating or doing.

Some common headache triggers include:

- Skipping meals or eating too little
- Having too little or too much caffeine
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Certain foods, such as red wine, aged cheese, and hot dogs

**Lifestyle changes** may help to reduce the frequency of headaches. These include:

- Stop smoking
- Reduce the amount of alcohol you drink
- Decrease or stop drinking/eating caffeine
- Eat and sleep on a regular schedule
- Exercise several times per week

Some women get migraine headaches just before they get their period. If that happens to you, mention it to your health care provider. There are medicines that can help.

**Should I see a health care provider?** — You should be seen right away if:

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- Your headache comes on suddenly, quickly becomes severe, or could be described as "the worst headache of your life"
- Your headache began right after you exercised
- You have not had headaches before and you also have weakness, numbness, or trouble seeing (migraine headaches can sometimes cause these symptoms, but you should be seen right away the first time these symptoms happen)
- Your headache started after a head injury
- If you have a headache and these other symptoms:
  - Fever (temperature greater than 100.4°F or 38°C)
  - Vomiting
  - Changes in vision or double vision
  - Significant neck pain or stiffness
  - Confusion
  - Loss of balance or unsteadiness
  - Loss of Consciousness or personality changes

**In an emergency go to Mount Nittany Medical Center or call 911 for an ambulance.**

**Test Results and Advice Nurse**

*Send secure message to advice nurse via the UHS website or call 814- 863-4463.*

## Appointments

Appointments can be made online via the UHS website, by phone 814-863-0774, or in person. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please call or go online to cancel. Otherwise you will be charged for the visit.

*This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. This information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.*