

Headaches

Studies suggest that approximately two thirds of the population experience headaches at some stage in their lives. Often these aches and pains are treated with painkillers to ease the suffering experienced, but the cause of the problem goes untreated, and the headaches return.

Headaches are brought about by many factors. The purpose of this information sheet is to assist in diagnosing what type of headache you may suffer from and therefore what type of treatment (other than taking painkillers) will help stop the pain.

The following is a list of various types of headaches.

Migraine	<p><u>Cause</u>: Constriction of vessels supplying brain with oxygen. May be related to caffeine consumption.</p> <p><u>Symptoms</u>: Severe pain on one or both sides of the head, an upset stomach and disturbed vision.</p>
Psychogenic	<p><u>Cause</u>: Underlying psychological component to causing headache.</p> <p><u>Symptoms</u>: May manifest in many varying symptoms.</p>
Traumatic	<p><u>Cause</u>: Due to injury – eg: car accident, fall.</p> <p><u>Symptoms</u>: Depends on type of injury.</p>
Intracranial	<p><u>Cause</u>: Bacterial or viral.</p> <p><u>Symptoms</u>: Extreme pain, can be deadly eg. Meningitis.</p>
Cranial	<p><u>Cause</u>: Specifically related to sinus, ear, dental, eye.</p> <p><u>Symptoms</u>: Depends on involvement of organ</p>
Cervicogenic	<p><u>Cause</u>: Disorder of the upper cervical spine, including the joints, muscles and ligaments may cause local neck pain that is also often referred to the head or face, manifesting as a headache. Having a crooked spine is often accompanied with suffering from an unbalanced occlusion. This means your upper and lower teeth don't fit together quite right.</p> <p><u>Symptoms</u>: Temporomandibular jaw joint problems may arise due to uneven biting forces and splint therapy may provide relief from these strains. Other treatments include balancing the bite.</p>

Sinus headaches

Cause: Infection or inflammation of the air filled spaces in the facial bones around the nose.

Symptoms: usually occur as a gnawing pain over or under both eyes. It usually accompanies blocked sinuses caused by bad cold, flu or allergies. The headache gets worse as the day progresses and increases in intensity if you bend forward.

Muscle tension headache

Cause: Muscle tension

Symptoms: Commonest form of headache. Usually felt on both sides of the head. The pain is dull and persistent, varying in intensity, it is often described as a feeling of pressure, heaviness or tightness in a band around the head.

Episodic tension type headaches

Symptoms: Can last from 30 minutes to a week. They usually occur all the time, with sufferers enduring headaches of varying intensity all day, everyday and can be woken by them at night. Chronic sufferers will notice the headaches at the start of the day, and it will remain as a dull ache throughout the course of the day.

Tension type headache

Cause: May be triggered by emotional or physical stress (eg. An argument, fatigue, pregnancy, prolonged reading, dehydration or sitting for a long time with bad posture) or by environmental factors such as loud music.

Treatment of these tension headaches includes a series of exercises aimed at:

- relieving muscle tension
- retraining muscle groups of the face to function harmoniously
- deprogramming this behaviour as a physical outlet for stress.

Splint therapy is required by some sufferers in order to prevent the related muscles from constricting for prolonged periods eg: during sleep. Whilst awake a conscious effort is required in order to alter muscle behaviours, a splint will assist in preventing destructive forces working whilst you are asleep

Adjunctive therapy includes lifestyle changes to combat stress by keeping fit, getting regular sleep and exercises and eating a balanced diet. Specific relaxation techniques or posture improvement techniques such as yoga or medication are also recommended. In many cases an unhealthy lifestyle

full of emotional stress and fast food is the underlying reason for the headache.

Medication such as Aspirin, Nurofen or Paracetamol may offer relief from mild pain. Tricyclic antidepressants have found to be useful in treating chronic tension headaches sufferers.

It is important to keep an accurate record of the exact symptoms and triggers for all your headaches so that your doctor can treat you accordingly.

- How long does your headache last?
- How many times a week/month?
- Are you woken by headaches, or are they worse in the morning?
- Does your headache start when you exercise, strain or cough?
- Does your headache get progressively worse over several days?

Assistance in dealing with your headaches may come from a variety of professionals including your dentist. Providing your dentist with as much useful information as possible will enable them to identify the cause of your headache and either begin to treat the cause or refer you to a doctor, dietician, physiotherapist or relaxation therapist who may be able to help.