

## Understanding Headache Pain

Many people experience headaches that can be remedied with simple over-the-counter medication. These infrequent headaches of mild discomfort seldom require medical attention. However, for the 40 to 50 million Americans that suffer from chronic headaches



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and the 28 million of them suffering from migraines, the pain is a very serious illness. While there are over 150 diagnostic categories of headaches, there are several types that are most predominant.

**Tension headaches** are the most common type of headache experienced by adults and adolescents. Often triggered by stress or anxiety, the pain is the result of muscle contraction and may recur over a long time period. Sufferers often describe these episodes as feeling as if one's head is in a vise and experiencing tension in the neck muscles. Nonprescription pain relievers are the most common treatment for tension headaches.

Another type of headache, often located in the forehead, cheekbones, or the bridge of the nose, is the **sinus headache**. Sinus blockages and inflammation of the mucosal linings in the sinuses create a feeling of pressure in the sinus cavities. Allergies do not create sinus headaches, though they may lead to sinus congestions that can cause headache pain.

**Cluster headaches** are extremely rare but are far more painful than migraine headaches. Typically the pain, related to the trigeminal nerve, is localized on one side of the head. Though these headaches tend to be seasonal, occurring most often in the spring, alcohol can trigger a cluster headache in chronic sufferers. These vascular headaches typically last only 30 to 90 minutes.

Finally, one of the most well-known types of headache is the **migraine**. Biochemical changes in the brain lead to the distention of blood vessels in the capillaries which contributes to debilitating migraine pain. Migraines, which are more common in women, are thought to be heritable and symptoms include intense throbbing pain, nausea, and sensitivity to light and sound. Neurological symptoms such as disturbances in vision may preclude or accompany migraines.

Immediate relief from pain and prevention for the future are two main goals for headache treatment. The best ways to ease headache pain are: relaxation to diminish stress; rest; nonprescription and prescription medication. However, some people experience rebound headaches when overusing over-the-counter and prescription medications, particularly when mixed with caffeine. Consult a doctor when experiencing recurring or different type of headaches.

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*“Dad, why are your keys in the fishbowl?”*



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