

What **you** should **know** about.....

HEADACHE

Facts about headaches:

- Headaches are very common. Nearly half of adults have headache.
- Migraine is the most common kind of recurrent, long-lasting, severe headache attacks.
- Medical research supports the use of various medical and non-medical treatments.

When should I seek professional help for my headaches?

- See a professional if you have a new severe headache or your usual headache changes and is more severe or frequent.
- If your headaches are not well-controlled by your current treatments.
- If you become pregnant and are taking headache medicines.

Who is qualified to evaluate me?

- Your family doctor is trained to assess and treat the common forms of headache.
- Neurologists are trained to assess the less common types of headache.
- Chiropractors and physiotherapists are trained to assess and treat headaches caused by head and neck muscle problems.

Will I need X-Rays, an MRI or laboratory tests?

- For most people, X-Rays, MRI and laboratory tests are not needed to diagnose headaches.
- Your doctor will order these tests only if a less common specific cause for headache is suspected.

What should I do to help myself?

- Use a '*headache diary*' to monitor your headache patterns and learn what might be causing your headaches or making them worse (triggers).
- Adjust your lifestyle to avoid headache triggers such as stress, irregular schedules and poor sleep, missing meals, certain foods and beverages, and taking pain medications too often.
- Learn and use stress management skills.

Should I take pain medicines?

- Many medications can be effective.
- Over-the-counter medicines such as ASA (e.g. Aspirin) acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol) and anti-inflammatory medication called NSAIDs (ibuprofen, e.g. Advil or Motrin) can be used, but not more often than 14 days per month, because frequent use can make headaches worse or harder to manage.
- Your doctor can prescribe other types of medications if your headaches are severe and interfere with your usual activities.

When should I go back to my doctor?

- If your headaches don't improve with the prescribed treatment and continue to interfere with your activities or affect your quality of life.
- If your headaches get worse or you have new symptoms.

Can headaches be prevented?

- If you are a person who gets headaches often, you may not be able to get rid of them completely.
- There is often a great deal that you can do to reduce how often and how bad your headaches are by using headache self-management skills. Self-management strategies are covered in depth in the information sheet "*What You Should Know About Headache Self-management*".
- There are a number of medicines and non-medical treatments that can help to reduce how often and how severe your headaches are.



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