

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

TENSION-TYPE HEADACHE

How would I know if my headaches are tension-type headaches?

- If your headaches are episodic (present some days and not others) and come with two or more of these symptoms:
 - are on both sides of your head
 - are not pulsing or throbbing
 - are mild to moderate intensity
 - are not worsened by activity

AND your headaches do not come with nausea; you probably have tension-type headache.

- Although the intensity of tension-type headaches are usually mild or moderate, they can be severe.
- Sometimes tension-type headaches occur more than 15 days per month and can come with mild nausea. These headaches are called chronic tension-type headaches.

Facts about tension type headache

- Can often be managed without going to your doctor.
- Can often be treated with over-the-counter pain killers, and prevented with lifestyle modifications (more info on self-management later in this handout).

When should I seek professional help for my headaches?

Seek professional help:

- If you have a new severe headache or your usual headache changes and is more severe.
- If you are still getting headaches with 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 including tension-type 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?

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

Self-management strategies - What should I do to help myself?

- Self-management strategies such as self-awareness, pacing, and reacting early are covered in depth in the information sheet "*What You Should Know About Headache Self-management*". Here are some examples of these . . .
 - Use a '*headache diary*' to keep track of 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, poor sleep, missing meals, uncomfortable stressful positions, poor posture, eyestrain and sometimes even pain medicine.
 - Learn about and use stress management skills.

Should I take medicines for my headaches?

- Over-the-counter medicines such as ASA (e.g. Aspirin), acetaminophen and anti-inflammatory medication called NSAIDs (such as ibuprofen e.g. Advil or Motrin, naproxen, diclofenac) can be effective particularly for mild or moderate tension-type headaches.
- Avoid using these medicines for more than 15 days a month.
- The following medicines are NOT recommended: muscle relaxants, narcotics, and migraine specific medicines known as triptans.
- Everyone is different. You may need to try several medicines before you are satisfied with the results.
- MORE is NOT necessarily BETTER. Overusing headache medicines can cause worse headaches (medication-overuse headache).

Can tension-type headaches be prevented or cured?

- There is no known cure for tension-type headaches.
- There are both medications and non-medical treatments that reduce how often tension-type headaches occur and how bad they are.
- If your headaches happen often and are interfering with your normal activities even when individual headaches are treated, discuss headache prevention with your doctor and review the 'self-management' strategies.



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