

Fact sheet No.6



Easy Read

Headache



This fact sheet helps you to know what's 'normal' and what you can expect to happen if you get a headache.



It also tells you when you should become concerned and see your doctor.

Headaches are common

About 8 out of 10 people have a tension-type headache from time to time, and 1 or 2 out of 10 people get migraines.



Tension-type headache

This is the 'ordinary' or 'everyday' headache.

Tension headache tends to be mild or moderate and affects both sides of the head.

It usually feels 'pressing' or 'tightening'.

It does not stop you doing everyday things.



Migrane

Migraine is a moderate or severe throbbing headache affecting one or both sides of the head.

It is made worse by ordinary daily activities.



Migraines can be caused by many different things such as:

- Certain foods
- Stress



- Hunger
- Tiredness



It can get worse during a woman's period or when taking the **contraceptive pill**.

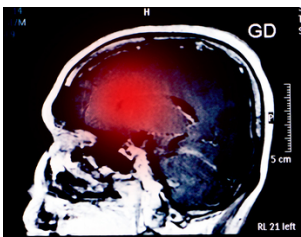


The **contraceptive pill** is a pill that some women take so they don't get pregnant.



Less common causes of headache

- **Cluster headache** - a bad pain around and above the eye
- Headache from taking too many pain killers - this affects about one to two out of 100 people
- Too much pressure inside the head - for example from a bleed or cancer.



What should happen?



Headaches are usually not serious or life-threatening.

Most get better by themselves, often within 24 hours.

You won't usually need any tests.

What can I do myself to get better?



Headache diary

Keep a headache diary and write down:

- How often you get headaches
- How long they last
- Whether they are mild, moderate or severe.

This can be useful when you need to discuss them with a doctor.



A useful online version for monitoring migraine headache is available at:
www.nationalmigrainecentre.org.uk/migraine-and-headaches/migraine-and-headache-diary/.



Lifestyle

Try to get plenty of rest and sleep, and use every opportunity to relax.

Drink lots of water

Drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of water a day.



Don't drink alcohol and take regular meals.

Pain killers

Various pain killers are available from your pharmacist.



Ask your pharmacist to help you choose the best one for you.



Special migraine medications are available for treating migraine.



Don't take painkillers for headaches for more than 15 days per month.

Other treatments

Acupuncture can help with migraine and tension type headache.



Acupuncture is a traditional Chinese treatment where thin needles are stuck into the body.



Riboflavin may help reduce the migraine attacks in some people. You can get it in a health shop.



Manual therapy or massage may help if you also suffer from neck aches.

When should I seek medical help?



Speak to a health professional if you notice any of these things:

- You start to get more and more headaches



- You vomit for no apparent reason or have a high fever. You develop a stiff neck or feel drowsy



- You suffer from headaches after a blow or other injury to your head



- Your headache stops you from getting to sleep or wakes you up



- Your headache is worse on coughing, straining, bending, lying flat or laughing



- You notice a change in your speech or personality



- You develop weakness, numbness or other odd sensations anywhere on your body, or you feel unsteady on your feet



- You get a sudden severe headache, like 'being hit with a hammer'



- Your eyes feel really uncomfortable when looking at bright light, or you suffer other new eye symptoms, such as sudden blind spots



- You have muscle pains, pain on chewing, a tender scalp, or feel unwell

Where can I find out more?



NHS Choices

Web: www.nhs.uk/conditions/headache/Pages/Introduction.aspx

Remember that your pharmacist can also help you.