

## PAIN-FREE FACTS ABOUT HEADACHES AND MIGRAINES

### HEADACHES

Anyone can experience a headache. According to the National Institutes of Health, more than 9 out of 10 adults will get a headache sometime in their life. They are a common cause of missed work or social events, decreased productivity, and can even affect one's well-being. Knowing how to recognize and manage headaches can help to improve quality of life.

### TYPES OF HEADACHES

The International Headache Society lists three types of headaches:

1. **Tension-type:** Tension-type headaches are the most common type. They can be described as a constant pressing or squeezing—almost like a belt is being tightened around the head. They can last from 30 minutes to several days.
2. **Migraine:** Migraine headaches can be a pulsating or throbbing pain, usually on one side of the head. It can also occur with or without nausea, visual disturbances, and sensitivity to light or noise. Migraines can run in families and are more likely in women. They can last from 4 to 72 hours.
3. **Cluster:** Cluster headaches are the least common of the three types. Attacks can appear suddenly and severely, lasting from 15 to 180 minutes. Pain can occur around the eye or on one side of the head, with a watery eye or nasal congestion. According to the American Headache Society, they only affect less than 1% of the U.S. population and are slightly more common in men.

### MORE ON MIGRAINES

The American Migraine Foundation states that roughly 12% of Americans suffer from migraine headaches. This equals over 36 million people! They also estimate that it costs the U.S. more than \$20 billion each year. This could be from direct costs, such as doctor visits or medications. This can also be from indirect costs, like missed work or lost productivity. Fortunately the majority of headaches, including migraines, can be managed with proper lifestyle changes or medications. Some medications can treat a migraine at the onset of an attack. Others can be used as a prevention to stop them before they develop.

### CAUSES AND TRIGGERS

One way to help decrease the frequency of headaches is to identify triggers and to avoid or manage them if possible. Keeping a "Headache Diary" can be a useful tool for you or your health provider to track your headaches. It may help to identify patterns or triggers to understand your headaches better. Common triggers include:

- Changes in weather
- Hormones
- Sleep issues (too much or too little sleep)
- Stress
- Strong stimuli (bright lights, noises, or odors)
- Foods or alcohol (processed meats, red wine, etc.)

### OTHER HELPFUL TIPS

- Limit drinking caffeine and alcohol
- Drink plenty of water and stay hydrated
- Develop a regular sleep schedule
- Do not skip meals
- Maintain a healthy diet
- Exercise regularly
- Limit processed foods and additives like monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- Sit up straight and maintain good posture
- Relax or meditate to ease stress

### WHEN TO SEEK HELP

Not all headaches will require a visit to your physician's office. However, some headaches may be a sign of something more serious. Immediately call or see a physician if you or someone you are with is experiencing a headache with any of these symptoms:

- Confusion, weakness, or loss of consciousness
- Headache following a head injury
- Numbness or loss of sensation on any part of the body
- Two or more recurrent headaches a week
- Sudden, severe headache with a stiff neck

*It is important to remember to speak with a physician regarding the best treatment options for you.*