

BE PAIN-FREE FOR NATIONAL MIGRAINE & HEADACHE AWARENESS MONTH

About Headaches

A headache is pain in the head or neck region. Anyone can experience one. According to the National Headache Foundation, over 45 million Americans suffer from chronic headaches. Of these, 28 million suffer from migraines. Headaches can vary in length, severity, and symptom presentation. They are a common cause of missed work or social events and decreased productivity. Fortunately, the majority of headaches, including migraines, can be managed with proper lifestyle changes or medications.

Types of Headaches

There are more than a hundred types of headaches. However, the International Headache Society lists three main types of headaches: tension-type, migraine, and cluster.

1. **Tension-type:** Tension-type is the most common form of headache. They can be described as a constant pressing or squeezing—almost like a band 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. They 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 are usually short episodes lasting from 15 to 180 minutes, but can appear suddenly and severely. 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.

Headache Triggers

Triggers can contribute to or increase the risk of having a headache. Triggers are different for everybody. Keeping a headache diary may help you identify which ones affect you. Once you have identified your triggers, avoiding them can help lower your chances of having headaches. Listed here are examples of potential triggers from the American Headache Society:

<i>Examples of Triggers</i>	
Dietary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skipping meals • Aged cheese, processed meats containing nitrates, or foods with monosodium glutamate • Alcohol/red wine • Dehydration • Too much caffeine, or caffeine withdrawal
Sleep Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sleeping too much • Sleeping too little
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extreme weather changes • Bright/flashing lights or other strong stimuli • Odors/scents such as perfumes, chemicals, or smog
Hormonal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Menstruation • Hormone replacement therapy • Birth control pills • Menopause
Stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life changes, family, health, job, finances, projects, etc.
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head trauma • Over-exertion

Treatment Options

Treat your headaches at the first sign of an attack for best outcomes. Keep medications with you when you go out. Sometimes, preventative medications may be taken to prevent migraines. If you have frequent or severe attacks, you should talk to your health care professional about developing a treatment plan.

<i>Treatment Options</i>	
Lifestyle modifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and avoid triggers • Maintain a consistent sleep schedule • Exercise regularly • Reduce stress • Eat well-balanced meals and avoid foods that can trigger a headache
Complementary therapies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relaxation techniques • Acupuncture • Physical therapy • Massage
Medications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acute medications – taken to stop an attack once it has begun • Preventative medications – taken daily to reduce the frequency of attacks, whether or not a headache is present currently or not

Always discuss with your health care provider before starting any treatment plan or taking medications.