



Leaflet: Headaches - ten tips

TEN TIPS FOR TACKLING TENSION HEADACHES

Sometimes tension headaches develop more frequently than usual, often during times of stress. Below are ten tips which may help to deal with tension headaches.

Relaxation . Different people find different things helpful. A walk, some exercise or simply taking a break from the normal routine may help. A massage of the shoulder and neck muscles is often helpful. A hot flannel applied to the neck or a warm bath may help.

Painkillers such as paracetamol or aspirin are commonly taken and are usually effective. It may be best to take painkillers as soon as a headache starts to develop. This may 'ward off' the headache more effectively than treating it after it has fully developed. A second dose of aspirin or paracetamol can be taken after 4 hours if necessary.

Anti-inflammatory painkillers are alternative treatments. Ibuprofen is an example. This can be bought at pharmacies but others need a prescription. Anti-inflammatories may be slightly more effective than paracetamol or aspirin.

Diary . It may be useful to keep a headache diary. Note down when, where, how bad and how long headaches occur. Also take a note of anything that may have caused it. A pattern may emerge and a 'trigger' may be identified. For example, bright sunshine, caffeine, alcohol, when tired, hungry, stressed, anxious, angry or emotional. Avoid headache triggers if possible.

Posture . Poor posture, particularly sitting at a desk for long periods, may cause tension on the neck muscles. Is this a possibility? Can it be corrected?

Poor eyesight can cause squinting and tension of the muscles around the eye. This may lead to headaches. An eye test from an optician may be a good idea.

Stress . Learning to cope with stress and to relax may help. Such techniques as breathing or relaxation exercises may ease anxiety in stressful situations and prevent possible headaches. Books and tapes on 'how to relax' are available.

Regular exercise has been found by some people to relieve stress and tension. This may have a knock-on effect of reducing frequent headaches. Fairly strenuous exercise for 30 minutes at least 3 times a week is best. However, any increase may be beneficial. Going for regular brisk walks may be more realistic for some people.

Depression can lead to frequent headaches. Depression is often treatable. Mention to a doctor if depression is suspected.

Consult a doctor if painkillers are needed every day for headaches. A preventative medicine may be advised. These are different to painkillers and have to be taken each day. Sometimes painkillers are a *cause* of headaches if they are taken every day. If the body becomes too used to painkillers, a 'rebound' headache may occur if they are *not* taken each day.

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