

# Headache

Headaches are something that affect millions of people every day, with varying degrees of severity and course. For some, headaches can significantly affect quality of life and ability to do normal activities. The good news is that often times they can be controlled. There are a variety of medications that can be used for relief and prevention of headaches, but there are also simple lifestyle adjustments that can be made to provide this same effect, and often at a much cheaper price! Since the cause of headaches are not well understood, the treatment tends to be very individualized. Your solution may lie somewhere in between adopting healthy habits and using non-drug treatments, as well as mixing in medications appropriately.

## Should I see a Doctor?

While oftentimes headaches are not serious, there are some cases where they are an indication of a medical condition that would require seeing your healthcare provider. Some examples include:

- ❖ You have a feeling like it is "the worst headache ever" or if a severe headache peaks quickly
- ❖ If it worsens over days or weeks
- ❖ It is associated with a fever or other systemic symptoms like weight loss, weakness or mental changes
- ❖ Onset after age 50



## Safe and Easy Lifestyle Solutions

**Know and avoid your headache triggers, these could include:**

- ❖ *Foods:* alcohol, chocolate, some cheeses, nitrates, tyramine, and many others
- ❖ *Environmental:* odors, bright lights, tobacco smoke, noises, climate change
- ❖ *Behavioral:* insufficient water intake, hunger, irregular sleep patterns, excessive exercise, not enough exercise

**Manage your stress levels:**

- ❖ Some examples include planning ahead, organizing your day, finding time in the day to relax, sufficient sleep

**Muscle relaxation:**

- ❖ Apply heat or ice to sore muscles, massage, proper posture, breathing exercises

**Keep a Headache diary:**

- ❖ This is a good way to keep track and find what may be the cause of your headaches. Record the time, severity, and duration of the headaches while looking for patterns associated with different activities or situations.

**Some medications could be the cause:**

- ❖ Talk with your healthcare provider or pharmacist for details on your current medications.
- ❖ A headache can also occur after consistently taking a medication for the headache then stopping, the absence of the medication then becomes the cause.
- ❖ Caffeine has an interesting role in a headache. Small doses can relieve headaches, large doses daily can cause a headache, and headache is a common caffeine withdrawal symptom.

## Medications for Relief & Prevention

**Relief Options:**

- ❖ *NSAIDs:* aspirin (eg Bayer, Excedrin), ibuprofen (eg Advil, Motrin), naproxen (eg Aleve)
- ❖ Acetaminophen (eg Tylenol)
- ❖ There are several prescriptions that can relieve headaches if required, ask your healthcare provider about these options.

**Preventative Options:**

- ❖ There are several prescription that can help prevent headaches, ask your healthcare provider about these options.
- ❖ Supplements like Magnesium, Feverfew and riboflavin can prevent onset.