

UAB Health Education

STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES

HEADACHES



A headache is pain in any region of the head, upper neck, or face. The pain can develop suddenly or gradually and can last several days. Headaches are very common and usually not serious. There are several different types of headaches, most commonly tension, migraine or sinus headaches.

SYMPTOMS

TYPE OF HEADACHE	CHARACTER	LOCATION	ASSOCIATED SYMPTOMS
TENSION	Constant, dull pain	Band around your head or on both sides (temples), sometimes start in shoulders and move up	Often brought on by stress; Neck pain
MIGRAINE	Severe pounding, pulsing pain	Often on one side of your head	Headache pain preceded by aura such as spots, lights or other change in vision; Worse with movement, bright lights and loud noises; Nausea/vomiting; Blurry vision
SINUS	Pain from pressure	Around your forehead, eyes, nose or cheeks	Worse with straining or sudden movement; Runny nose, swollen face, fever, ear pressure

DIAGNOSIS

Generally based on symptoms and physical exam. It may be helpful if you can keep a journal to keep track of the pattern of your headaches. This can help determine some triggers to avoid and can help guide treatment options. A guide to some common triggers can be found [here](#). Some examples of journals can be found on common apps such as [Migraine Buddy](#) or [Migraine Coach](#) or on the following sites:

- https://familydoctor.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/HeadacheJournal_AR3.pdf
- <https://headaches.org/resources/headache-diary-keeping-a-diary-can-help-your-doctor-help-you/>
- Triggers: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/530d1c5be4b0e5f490d6eaef/t/53334ce1e4b05b79d04b113c/1395870945113/triggers.pdf>

TREATMENT

- Most headaches can be treated with over the counter pain medicine such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), naproxen (Aleve) or acetaminophen (Tylenol).
- Specific prescription therapies exist for migraine headaches including medications that treat the headache in the moment, and if your migraines are happening frequently, medications taken daily to prevent the headaches.
- Note: If you are using over-the-counter pain medications very regularly, you may be at risk for rebound headaches which are headaches that occur when you suddenly stop these medications because your body has gotten used to them.

CALL STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES IF

- You have a headache following a head injury
- Your headaches are increasing in severity or frequency (having to take medications more than 2 times per week)
- Headache with fever, stiff neck, persistent changes in vision, confusion, seizure

RESOURCES

FamilyDoctor.org <https://familydoctor.org/condition/headaches/>

RISK FACTORS

- Stress, depression, anxiety
- Changes in sleep
- Stiff or sore muscles
- Skipping meals or not drinking enough fluid
- Certain medications, foods or beverages
- Genetics

PREVENTION

- Get plenty of sleep, maintain a routine
- Manage stress, include relaxation time
- Do not skip meals, drink adequate fluids
- Regular exercise, stretching, maintain good posture
- Avoid any identified triggers