

Headaches

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What Is a Headache?

A headache is pain or discomfort anywhere in the head, face, or upper neck. Headaches are very common and can range from mild to severe.

Common Types of Headaches

Tension Headaches - The most common type of headache. Often described as a dull ache, pressure, or tight band around the head.

Migraine Headache - Usually cause moderate to severe throbbing pain and may be accompanied by:

- Nausea or vomiting
- Sensitivity to light
- Sensitivity to sound
- Visual disturbances ("aura")

Cervicogenic Headache - Headaches that originate from problems in the neck. Pain often begins in the neck and spreads into the back of the head, forehead, temples, or behind the eyes.

What Causes Headaches?

Primary Headaches - These are not caused by another medical condition and include:

- Tension headaches
- Migraines

Secondary Headaches - These result from another health problem, such as:

- Head injury
- Infection
- Medication side effects or withdrawal
- Blood vessel disorders
- Other medical conditions

How Are Headaches Diagnosed?

Diagnosis begins with a review of your symptoms, medical history, and a physical examination.

Depending on your symptoms, additional testing such as imaging studies, laboratory tests, or referral to another healthcare provider may be recommended.

Treatment

For tension headaches and headaches related to neck problems, treatment may include:

- Chiropractic adjustments and manual therapy
- Stretching and strengthening exercises
- Soft tissue therapy or massage
- Heat, ice, and other therapeutic modalities

For migraine headaches, treatment may also include:

- Identifying and avoiding triggers
- Improving sleep habits
- Stress management
- Staying well hydrated
- Regular physical activity

Additional treatments may include over-the-counter medications, prescription medications, or treatment directed at the underlying cause.

Prognosis

Most patients with tension headaches and headaches related to neck problems respond well to conservative treatment. Migraine symptoms often improve with a combination of lifestyle changes and appropriate medical care.

Typical Duration of Care

Many patients experience improvement within **4 to 8 weeks**, often requiring approximately **10 to 14 visits**, depending on the severity and duration of symptoms.

When to Seek Immediate Medical Attention

Seek emergency medical care if you experience:

- A sudden, severe headache unlike any you've had before
- Headache after a significant head injury
- Weakness, numbness, or difficulty speaking
- Loss of consciousness
- Vision loss
- Seizures
- Fever with severe headache and neck stiffness