



Headache

Definition

- Pain or discomfort of the scalp or forehead areas
- The face and ears are excluded

Causes

- Viral illnesses: Most headaches are part of a viral illness, especially with colds. These usually last a few days.
- Muscle tension headaches: Most common type of recurrent headaches. Muscle tension headaches give a feeling of tightness around the head. The neck muscles also become sore and tight. Tension headaches can be caused by staying in one position for a long time, such as with reading or using a computer. Other children get tension headaches as a [reaction to stress](#), such as pressure for better grades or family disagreements.
- Migraine headaches: Recurrent severe, incapacitating headaches
- Other common causes: Hunger, exertion, sunlight, coughing
- Frontal sinusitis: can cause a frontal headache just above the eyebrow. Rare before 10 years old because frontal sinus not developed. Other sinuses cause face pain, not headache.
- Serious causes: [Meningitis](#) or encephalitis. Symptoms include a headache, stiff neck, vomiting, fever and confusion.

Care Advice

Treatment for Mild Headache

1. **PAIN MEDICINE**: Give acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol) or ibuprofen for pain relief. Headaches due to fever are also helped by fever reduction.
2. **FOOD**: Give fruit juice or food if your child is hungry or hasn't eaten in more than 4 hours (Reason: Skipping a meal can cause a headache in many children).
3. **REST**: Lie down in a quiet place and relax until feeling better.
4. **LOCAL COLD**: Apply a cold wet washcloth or cold pack to the forehead for 20 minutes.
5. **STRETCHING**: Stretch and massage any tight neck muscles.
6. **CALL YOUR DOCTOR IF**:
 - a. Headache becomes severe
 - b. Vomiting occurs

- c. Isolated headache lasts over 24 hours
 - d. Headache lasts over 3 days
 - e. Your child becomes worse
7. **MUSCLE TENSION HEADACHES:** Extra Advice
- a. If something is bothering your child, help him talk about it and get it off his mind.
 - b. Teach your child to take breaks from activities that require sustained concentration. Encourage your child to do relaxation exercises during the breaks.
 - c. Teach your child the importance of getting adequate sleep.
 - d. If over-achievement causes headaches, help your child find more balance.
 - e. Caution: Your child should have a complete medical checkup before you conclude that recurrent headaches are due to worrying too much or stress.

Treatment for Migraine Headache

1. Reassurance: This headache is similar to previous migraine headaches that your child has experienced.
2. **MIGRAINE MEDICATION:**
 - a. If your child's doctor has prescribed a specific medication for migraine, give it as directed as soon as the migraine starts.
 - b. If not, ibuprofen is the best over-the-counter drug for migraine. Give ibuprofen now and repeat in 6 hours if needed.
3. **SLEEP:** Have your child lie down in a dark, quiet place and try to fall asleep. People with migraine often awaken from sleep with their migraine gone.

When To Call

Call 911 Now (your child may need an ambulance) If

- Difficult to awaken or passed out
- Confused thinking/talking or slurred speech
- Blurred or double vision
- Weakness of arm or leg or unsteady walking

Call Your Doctor Now (night or day) If

- Your child looks or acts very sick
- Stiff neck (can't touch chin to chest)
- Severe headache
- Vomiting

Call Your Doctor Within 24 Hours (between 8 am and 4 pm) If

- You think your child needs to be seen
- Fever
- Sinus pain (not just congestion) of forehead

Call Your Doctor During Weekday Office Hours If

- You have other questions or concerns
- Headache without other symptoms present over 24 hours
- Sore throat present over 48 hours
- Any headache present over 3 days
- Headaches are a recurrent chronic problem

The American Academy of Pediatrics (2011) at www.healthychildren.org