

HEADACHE MANAGEMENT TIPS

Avoiding the Emergency Room (ER)

People who suffer from headaches go to the ER for several different reasons:

- They didn't have their medicine with them when the headache came on.
- They ran out of medicine.
- Their regular treatment didn't work.
- The headache was worse than usual.
- They were afraid that the headache was a sign of something more serious.

What can you do to avoid a trip to the Emergency Room?

- Keep your headache medication with you at all times.
- Keep a supply of your medicine at home, so you don't run out when you need it.
- Plan with your doctor the steps you'll take if you begin to have a headache or if your headaches are much worse than usual.

Getting Control of Your Headaches

Headaches usually cannot be cured, but with a good management plan you can get greater relief and control of your headaches. A good headache management plan has two parts: the treatment you get from your doctor, and the steps you can take yourself.

Take an active role with your doctor to develop a plan that works for you. Diagnosing a headache or migraine is complex. Your doctor relies upon you to provide complete information about your headaches:

- How severe is your headache pain?
- How often do you have headaches?
- When you have headaches
 - How long do they usually last?
 - Do you have other symptoms, like nausea or sensitivity to light?
 - Are they always the same, or do you have more than one kind of headache?
 - Do you miss work, social, or family activities?
- What medications do you take for your headaches? What other things do you do (like resting or using a cold compress)? How well do they work for you? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

Your doctor uses this information to develop your headache management plan. Often, the first plan needs adjusting. Finding the right plan can take some time and changes.

Understanding Headache Medication

Your management plan may include one or more types of headache medications:

Medications That Relieve Headache Pain

- Treat the pain of a headache, but not the cause of the pain.
- Work best if taken at the first sign of pain.
- Should not be used more often than 3 days a week.
- Taking more pain medication than recommended can cause you to have headaches more often.

Medicines That Stop (Abort) Migraine Headaches

- Are only useful for patients with migraine.
- Are used for relief of moderately to severely disabling attacks.
- Should be kept with you at all times.
- Are most effective when used as early in the attack as possible.

Medications to Help You Get Fewer Headaches (Prophylaxis)

- Are used for people who get headaches several times a month.
- Are taken every day, even when you don't have a headache.
- Help you have headaches less often, but don't completely eliminate them.
- May help make your headaches less severe.

For All Medicines

- Take your medicine as directed by your doctor.
- If your medicine does not seem to be relieving your headaches when taken as directed, call your doctor.
- Some headache medicines take some time to begin to work well, so don't be tempted to stop taking your medicine without your doctor's approval.
- Never increase the amount you're taking, or take it more often than directed.
- Call your doctor if you notice persistent side effects.
- Be sure to tell your doctor about any other medications you are taking, and about any other health conditions you have, before starting any new treatment.
- Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant.

What You Can Do To Manage Your Headaches

Avoid Things That Trigger Headaches - Headache triggers don't actually cause a headache – but act like a “switch” that starts a headache. Headache triggers include foods, drinks, smells, feelings, hunger, or hormones. You will find a list of common headache triggers in the Action Plan.

Reduce the Pain of a Migraine Attack by:

- Lying down in a dark, quiet room.
- Putting a cold rag or compress on your forehead.
- Massaging your scalp.

Reduce the Pain of a Tension Headache by:

- Taking a warm shower or putting a warm compress on your forehead.
- Using good posture when sitting, reading, or working at a computer.
- Massaging sore muscles can help reduce headache pain.
- Getting enough rest and sleep.
- Exercising your neck and shoulders frequently when doing desk work or staying in one position for an extended time.

Learn More about Headaches

Visit the following web sites:

- <http://www.migrainehelp.com> Migraine Resource Center
- <http://www.headtalk.com>
- <http://www.achenet.org> or call 800-255-ACHE American Council for Headache Education
- <http://www.headaches.org> or call 800-843-2256 National Headache Foundation
- <http://www.nih.gov/health/chip/nids/headac/hhtra.htm>, National Institutes of Health, Neurological Institute
- <http://www.healthfinder.com> Health Finder