

HEADACHE

Headache is a common problem. All of us experience headache one time or other in our life. Most of the headaches are benign. Some are life threatening and some cause chronic disability.

It is important to know the common features of these various headaches. Headaches persisting for a longer period leading to daily disability need to be investigated by a physician. If the headache starts suddenly one has to go to the emergency to rule out bleeding in the brain.

Bleed: The headache in this condition will be **sudden** and **severe** at the time of onset. This will be the worst headache of the lifetime. The headache might be precipitated by exercise or sexual intercourse. There may be associated nausea and vomiting or patient may become unconscious. This can happen spontaneously or after a fall. Blood pressure can be high as result of or as a cause for the bleed. There may be a family history of bleeding in the brain. Uncontrolled increasing Blood Pressure can cause sudden Headache and be the presenting feature of Stroke. Immediately one should go to the emergency without wasting even a minute.

Tension Headache: This is common. It occurs mostly in the evening and relieved by sleep and relaxation. It is worsened by Stress, anxiety and pressure from work or family. Most of the time it feels as if some one is tying a band across the forehead or a heavy weight is placed on top of head. Simple pain killers or various relaxation techniques will help.

Migraine: This is common in women. It can affect one or both sides of the head. It throbs with nausea and vomiting. The pain may be preceded by Vision disturbances like Zig Zag lines or loss of one half of eye sight. Light, sound and smell can disturb these people. It may be associated with menstrual periods or precipitated by certain foods like chocolate, cheese or monosodium containing food substances. Some one in the family may have similar problem. It can vary during lifetime and may disappear after menopause or during pregnancy. Simple pain killers may relieve the pain in the beginning but if the frequency and severity increases specific medications are needed with the advice from your physician.

Brain tumor: When headache occurs lot of people worry about cancer in the brain. Cancer can occur even without causing headache. All headaches are not due to cancer. These headaches can occur in the morning or wakes the person in the middle of the night with nausea and vomiting. The pain can get worse with cough, sneeze or bending down. There may be weakness or numbness of the body. Walking may be unsteady. Speech may be affected. Any headache persisting without reason beyond two weeks need to be investigated by consulting with a Physician

Infections: Meningitis can cause headache with fever and stiff neck with nausea and vomiting. There may be associated back pain, skin rash or alteration of conscious level. Usually this comes on slowly over few days. Sinusitis headaches may be associated with discharge in the back of the throat. They occur in the morning with tenderness over the face. Fever chills may precede the pain. Patient may have allergy or sneezing.

Inflammation of arteries: This is called temporal arteritis. This occurs in people over age of 60. Pain will be in the temples. It will be sensitive to touch the spot and nausea and vomiting can occur. It may be associated with loss of appetite, weight and night sweating. It is important to get treated as the inflammation can extend into the arteries of the eye and cause blindness.

Any headache lasting more than two weeks without reason should be investigated within a short time and any severe headache should be investigated immediately Please consult your doctor if there is a change in character of the headache or it comes with full force at onset of pain. The above features are only a guide. If you are in doubt about your symptoms you should see your family physician.

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Links:

<http://www.ama-assn.org/special/migraine/migraine.htm>

<http://www.headaches.org/>

<http://www.migraines.org/>

<http://www.achenet.org/>

<http://www.migrainehelp.com/>