



Dr. Lara Varisco Leonhardt, MD

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# Bee well pediatrics

## What is a headache?

A headache is a symptom that can have many causes. Sometimes a headache is caused by:

- a cold or other viral illness
- a high fever
- a head injury
- hunger (many teens get a headache in the late afternoon when they are hungry).
- dehydration

A tension headache is a headache caused by tense muscles in the face, neck, or scalp. These headaches give a feeling of tightness all 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 reading, playing video games or using a computer. Many people get tension headaches as a reaction to stress (such as pressure for better grades or family conflicts). If you get a lot of headaches, see your healthcare provider. They may be caused by something besides tension.

## How long does it last?

Many headaches caused by illness go away when the fever comes down. Others come and go during the illness. Tension headaches usually last from a few hours to a day and you may have them often.

## How can I take care of myself?

- General headache care
  - Lie down and rest until you feel better. It is important to get enough sleep.
  - If you are hungry, eat some food or drink fruit juice.
  - Take ibuprofen (Advil) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) as soon as the headache begins.
  - Put a cool, wet washcloth on your forehead.



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- **Tension headaches**

If you have been checked by your healthcare provider and still have tension headaches, try the following to help ease the pain:

- When you get a headache, lie down and relax. Take acetaminophen or ibuprofen as soon as the headache starts. (Avoid aspirin if you have a fever.) The medication is more effective if it is started early.



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- If something is bothering you, talk about it and get it off your mind.
- Don't skip meals if doing so brings on headaches.
- Encourage lots of water; hydration is one of the keys to preventing headaches
- Cut back on the amount of caffeine in your diet.
- Stretch and massage any tight neck muscles.
- Get regular exercise, which releases natural painkillers (endorphins).
- To prevent tension headaches, take breaks from activities that require sustained concentration. Do relaxation exercises during the breaks.
- If overachievement causes headaches, get out of the fast track.

**Keep headache log to bring with you to your next visit. Please include day, time, activity when headache started, how long it lasted , and if took medication.**

## **When should I call my healthcare provider?**

Call IMMEDIATELY if:

- The pain is severe and persists more than 2 hours after you take pain medication.
- You have trouble seeing, thinking, talking, or walking.
- Your neck is stiff.
- You are feeling very sick.

Call during office hours if:

- Headaches are a recurrent problem for you.
- The headache has lasted more than 24 hours even though you have taken pain medicines.
- You have other concerns or questions.