

Headaches: The Relentless Battle

We all have them. Pounding, tight sensations that may wake one from a sound sleep or worsen over a day full of tension and conflict. Research has found that 50% to 70% of all people have headaches. For most people headaches are a minor problem, but 10% to 12% of those who have headaches seek medical attention. It is estimated that 29 million Americans suffer from severe, disabling headache and that they spend \$4 billion a year to alleviate it. Headaches may account for an additional \$12 billion annually in such indirect costs as lost workdays, compensation, litigation, and quackery.

Although there are several classes of headache the most common are migraine and tension headaches. *Migraine* or vascular headaches are usually related to the constriction of small blood vessels in the head during the preheadache phase followed by vascular dilation during the headache phase. Such headaches involve recurrent attacks of pain that may show a broad spectrum of effects ranging from simple restriction of activity to hospital admission.

Muscle contraction or *tension* headaches are muscular in nature and involve extended tightness or tension in the muscles of the head, neck and shoulders. Usually starting in the back neck region the tightness moves forward to involve the entire head with sensations of a general constriction across the brow.

Individuals affected by migraine headaches may need to avoid foods which can trigger migraines such as:

Ripened cheeses marinated	Chocolate	Vinegar	Anything fermented, pickled, or
Sour cream	Yogurt	Fresh breads	Nuts, peanut butter
Onions	Citrus foods	Bananas	Pizza
Pork	Excessive tea	Coffee	Avocado

You may find a specific sensitivity to a food and need to remove that item from your diet. In determining such "triggers" keep a diary of foods and, when a headache occurs go back over the last 24 hours and review your diet.

For tension headaches it is critical that you try to attack the problem from both a physical and psychological angle. Loosening the tight muscles is a

prime directive and can be accomplished through simple massage, use of vibrators, ice packs or stretching exercises. Examine the extent to which you focus on negative thought patterns and keep yourself in an aroused state of preparedness.

When a headache hits be flexible in your approach to management. Recognize that you may not be able to "power your way through" the pain. Use pain medication in an appropriate fashion. Overuse of such drugs can actually lead to an increase in headaches. Learn to talk with others about pressures in your life and seek medical attention if the headache has a sudden increase in pain or is more frequent.

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