

Natural Help 4...

Headaches



What are Headaches?

A [headache](#) is characterized by aching pain or discomfort in the head, scalp, face or neck. Most headaches occur biologically outside the skull in the blood vessels, nerves, and muscles that surround the head and neck. When the **muscles or blood vessels swell, they put pressure on the nerves**. The nerves in turn send pain messages to the brain, and the individual suffers from a [headache](#).

Headaches are a very common medical ailment and can have a profound effect on people's working and personal lives. Research shows that seven in ten people have at least one headache a year, and approximately forty-five million Americans suffer from [chronic headaches](#). While some people have headaches frequently, others may seldom have them. Often, people who suffer from headaches simply need to make a few **lifestyle changes to avoid them**.

Diagnosing Headaches

The pain can be mild or severe, and can occur occasionally or frequently. While the vast majority of headaches are not life-threatening, they can occasionally be due to a **more serious underlying cause, such as a tumor or stroke**. The most common types of headaches include tension, migraine, and cluster headaches.

Primary versus Secondary Headaches

Primary Headaches

Primary headaches are not associated with any underlying medical condition. There are three types of primary headaches: tension (muscular contraction headache), migraine (vascular headache), and cluster.

- **Tension headache:** Tension headaches are very common, and almost everyone experiences this type of [headache](#). A tension-type headache is as a result of the head and neck muscles contracting. Causes are often associated with stress, fatigue, anxiety, poor posture, and eye strain.
- **Migraine:** A migraine is an intense, throbbing pain, usually limited to one side of the head, sometimes spreading to both sides. It occurs when the blood vessels of the head and neck constrict, which results in decreased blood flow to the vessels. Migraines are recurrent. In most cases they last for a few hours, but can continue for up to three days. People suffering from migraines are usually very sensitive to light and have a low auditory tolerance for noise.
- **There are two types of migraine:** migraine with an aura (a group of visual symptoms) and migraine without an aura. They are more common in women than men and, although much more common in adults, they can

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also occur in children. The underlying cause of migraines it is not clear, and it is likely that there are a variety of causes which differ from person to person. There is evidence to suggest that triggers may include foods like chocolate, citrus fruit, cheese, caffeine, some preservatives, and other food additives.

- **Cluster:** Cluster headaches are recurrent, painful attacks which occur, as the name suggests, in clusters. Typically they occur at least once a day over a period of weeks or even months. They then tend to disappear for a lengthy period and can recur again at a later stage. They are caused by an increase in blood flow due to the widening of the blood vessels in the brain. Cluster headaches are less common than a [tension headache](#) or migraine. It is more common in men than in women.

Secondary Headaches

Secondary headaches are associated with an underlying medical condition such as sinus disorders, head injury, tumor, stroke, infection, hypoglycemia and cerebrovascular disease. If you have a headache that does not go away, is present on waking in the morning, is made worse by lying down, or is accompanied by any other symptoms, it is always best to consult your doctor for a check-up.

A thorough physical examination will be performed if your doctor suspects an underlying disorder is causing the headaches. Questions regarding the frequency, duration, location, symptoms and triggers of the headache will all help your doctor to determine how serious your headache is.

Depending on the severity of the headache, you may be referred to a neurologist for further tests:

- Cranial CT (computerized tomography) scan
- Cranial MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scan
- Sinus X-rays
- EEG (electroencephalogram)
- Artery biopsy
- Lumbar puncture


What are the symptoms of headaches?

- Pain in the head
- Blurred vision
- Nausea and vomiting
- Hearing impairment
- Irritability
- Confusion
- Malaise
- Discomfort

What Causes Headaches?

There are a number of **contributing factors which may cause headaches**. Some may be due to hunger and dehydration, while others may be due to severe illnesses such as meningitis or tumors.

The common causes and triggers of day to day headaches include:



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Michele Carelse, Clinical Psychologist



All of our natural remedies are formulated by our expert team of herbalists, naturopaths and homeopaths, and headed by Michele Carelse.

Michele has had years of experience in the manufacturing and use of natural remedies. In addition, she is a trained Clinical Psychologist and has been incorporating natural remedies into her treatment of patients with depression, anxiety, ADD, ADHD and stress for many years with spectacular results.

- Emotional stress
- Depression
- Anger
- Anxiety

The constriction of blood vessels or the tightening of facial and scalp muscle when feeling negative emotions can all result in decreased blood and oxygen flow to the brain, which can lead to a headache.

- **Illnesses:** Sinus infections, eyestrain, vision problems, allergies, dental infections, grinding and clenching of teeth, viral infections, urinary tract infections, and head injuries can all cause headaches.
- **Insomnia:** The lack of sleep or sleep disorders can cause muscle tension, which can lead to headaches.
- **Food sensitivities:** Chocolate, caffeine, dairy products, food additives like nitrates, nitrites and monosodium glutamate are well-known headache triggers
- **Skipping meals:** Irregular meals and fad diets can lower blood sugar levels and give you a headache. Dehydration is also a common cause of headaches.
- **Alcohol & drugs:** The consumption of alcohol, prescribed medication, cocaine, amphetamines, and diet pills can lead to headaches.
- **Rebound headaches:** Regular use of some painkillers may result in a rebound headache once the painkiller begins to wear off. Headaches may also occur during withdrawal from addictive substances such as drugs, caffeine, and prescription medication.
- **Other factors:** Glare, poor lighting conditions, physical exertion, and chemical sensitivities also causes headaches.

When Should I Worry?

Warning signs that should concern you include:

- A headache with symptoms of numbness, speech difficulty, and one-sided weakness – this may be signs of a stroke.
- A sudden onset of a headache as well as symptoms of a fever and stiff neck – these may be signs of meningitis.
- An extremely painful, headache, possibly the worst you've ever had – this may be associated with an aneurysm and possible rupture.
- A headache that worsens over time (particularly if neurological symptoms are displayed) may be indicative of a space occupying lesion in the brain such as a tumor or an abscess.

If you are at all concerned about the nature of your headaches, their frequency or any accompanying symptoms, it is imperative that you see your health care practitioner for a full examination and check up.

Help for Headaches

Generally, **over-the-counter pain relievers** such as aspirin, paracetamol and ibuprofen are widely **used to alleviate symptoms**. If you suffer from chronic headaches, your doctor will more than likely prescribe medication such as antidepressants, beta-blockers, and calcium channel-blockers to prevent

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headaches before they occur.

While these conventional medications do reduce the pain, they are heavy-strength medications, and can produce **harmful side effects** and the **risk of addiction**. Always research side effects, potential for addiction, and alternatives available before deciding on a treatment plan.

Natural Remedies:

Natural and alternative therapies can be used to **help manage headaches safely, without the risk of addiction**.

- Biofeedback and relaxation therapy
- Hypnosis
- Chiropractic manipulation
- Homeopathy
- Herbal remedies
- Acupuncture
- Massage
- Aromatherapy

Herbal and homeopathic remedies can offer an **effective natural solution** and can be of **assistance in alleviating the painful and discomforting symptoms** of a headache. Herbs such as Cayenne (*Capsicum frutescens*/*Capsicum spp.*), Peppermint (*Mentha x piperita*), Dong quai (*Angelica sinensis*), Devil's claw (*Harpagophytum procumbens*) and Ginkgo biloba (*Ginkgo biloba*) can be extremely beneficial in helping to soothe pounding headaches. In addition, studies have suggested that the herb Feverfew, when used regularly, can help to **eliminate or greatly reduce the frequency and severity** of headaches and migraines.

In taking a holistic view of your health, you can address many factors that contribute to optimal physical, mental and emotional well-being. **Natural and herbal remedies** can be **used to help address the root causes of the ailment and not just the symptoms**. A Naturopath or Homeopath will be able to advise you on which treatment best suits your needs.

Can Headaches Affect Children?

Children are affected by the same type of headaches as adults and they are also often hereditary. Generally, headaches occur in children because they have spent too much time in the sun, stayed up too late, or they have knocked their heads. If your child experiences **recurring headaches and symptoms of vomiting, seizures, blurred vision, or fever, a doctor should be consulted immediately**.

Most headaches can be **easily treated at home** by teaching your child to breathe deeply, lying down in a quiet, dark room or by placing a cool cloth across the forehead. **A child younger than the age of twelve should never be given aspirin (salicylic acid)**.

Tips to Avoid Headaches

Adopting a few simple lifestyle changes can help you to avoid getting headaches:



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- Eat a **healthy diet** filled with fruit and vegetables, and do not skip meals for too long.
- **Drink plenty of water** to keep the body hydrated.
- **Exercise regularly** to improve your circulation
- Use **relaxation techniques** such as deep breathing exercises, hands-on-healing, and therapeutic touch to reduce the intensity of a headache.
- **Keep a headache journal** to document each headache – how long it lasts and when it happened and what triggered it, to discuss with your health care professional.
- Apply an ice pack to your forehead and temples or a heat pack to the back of your neck to **loosen tense muscles**.
- **Soak in a hot tub**; the hot water helps to relax the contracted muscles that cause the headache.
- **Spend time outside in the fresh air** or go for a walk on the beach.
- **Limit alcohol** consumption and **increase water** intake.
- **Limit hours** spent in front of a computer screen.
- Avoid watching television for too long or in a dimly-lit room.
- Try to get a **good night's rest**.

The Natural Approach

While Western medicine has become the norm in many cultures, it is not the only treatment option. Conventional western medicine, often called allopathic medicine, is the system of medicine taught at most medical schools and most pharmaceutical and synthetic medicines are manufactured and marketed according to the principles of allopathic medicine. Allopathic medicine is also sometimes called orthodox medicine.

Because most of us in the Western world have grown up in a society in which allopathic medicine is the prevailing norm, we forget that, only a few decades ago, homeopathic, herbal and other natural medicines were commonly available – and freely used even by conventional doctors. While there are often heated debates about which system of medicine is ‘better’ than the other, many responsible doctors (whether they are allopathic or not) recognize that both have a role to play in the treatment program.

Natural medicine has often been frowned on by conventional doctors, especially by those who did not have sufficient knowledge of these medicines. However, it is encouraging to note that some medical schools are now beginning to re-introduce it into their course work, thereby providing doctors with a wider range of treatment options from which to choose. In many countries, especially in Europe, India and China, natural and homeopathic medicines are commonly prescribed by conventional doctors and represent a significant part of the total annual drug sales.

Naturopathy is a branch of medicine (just as allopathy is a branch of medicine) which operates according to the underlying philosophy that the body has an innate capacity to heal itself. While natural medicines are often called ‘alternative’ or ‘complimentary’ medicines, they are, in fact, a unique and independent form of medicine in their own right, well able to treat a variety of conditions. Perhaps the term ‘holistic’ medicine is more apt, given the broad range of treatment options and approaches which are to be found within the practice of natural medicine, which encompasses many different disciplines, including herbalism, homeopathy, iridology, osteopathy, chiropractic, therapeutic massage techniques,

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aromatherapy, acupuncture and many, many more.

Most naturopaths will use a variety of treatment modalities in order to treat their patients in a holistic way to support health, relieve symptoms and prevent future disease. In fact, even the World Health Organization defines health as being "... more than simply the absence of illness. It is the active state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being." This is a wonderfully clear description of holistic or natural medicine, which strives to support health (thereby relieving or preventing symptoms), rather than simply eliminating disease.

Although allopathic medicine certainly has a role to play and has made a tremendous contribution to medical science during the past century, there is a growing perception that it is not the only answer and that, in many cases, holistic medicine can accomplish just as much, if not more – without the risk of side effects, addiction and sacrifice to health so commonly associated with pharmaceutical drugs. Contrary to common perception, and provided that they are manufactured in the correct way, natural medicines can work quickly and safely to promote healing.

In many cases, they can succeed where pharmaceutical drugs have failed. Despite frequent reports that they are ‘unproven’ and ‘untested’, the opposite is true. Natural medicines have a long history of usage and there is a wealth of empirical evidence to support their effectiveness and safety. In addition, active clinical research is carried out by many academic hospitals and universities to support the extensive traditional and empirical evidence behind natural medicines.

It is also important to know that, like any medicine, herbal and homeopathic medicines must be manufactured in the correct way, following acceptable procedures and manufacturing methods to ensure maximum effectiveness and safety. Due to the recent rise in popularity of natural remedies, many companies have sprung up to take advantage of the market. Unfortunately not all of them are equipped to manufacture to the correct standards, often resulting in a flood of inferior (and sometimes even unsafe) remedies onto the market – and giving natural remedies a bad name.

Even some pharmaceutical companies have rushed to claim their market share by producing so-called ‘standardized’ extracts of herbs and offering these as superior to the tried and tested methods of naturopathic manufacturing. Nothing could be further from the truth. While ‘standardized’ extracts may offer benefit of easy consistency of dosage (and cheaper more efficient production lines), they have grave disadvantages. These include an increase in side effects as the medicines produced in this manner lose the natural protective properties of the herbs. In some cases, these side effects have proved fatal – as was seen in the liver toxicity associated with standardized extracts of kava kava, a herb previously safely used for generations without any known side effects.

Most naturopaths recommend what is called the Full Spectrum Method of extraction – which retains the benefits of ALL the active ingredients within the herb as opposed to isolating only one – thereby providing a more complete treatment as well as superior protection against side effects.

Whatever your choice, always choose wisely. Research what is best for you. If you have a chronic or life threatening condition, don't make changes without first discussing them with your doctor in order that your condition may be monitored. Well informed and supportive practitioners will support patients who want to take



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