

Washington Adventist Hospital Health Tip of the Week

Headaches

Forty-five million Americans get recurring headaches. Headache pain is one of the leading reasons why people see doctors, accounting for some 10 million office visits a year. The three most common types of headache are: tension, migraine and sinus.

Tension Headache: Originates in the area where the muscles of the head and neck meet. A tension headache is a steady, aching pain that wraps around your entire head. The pain can last from 30 minutes to several days and it is likely to occur toward the end of the day. It is generally caused by stress but can be brought on by cold food such as ice cream.

- * Massage the muscles at the back of the neck.
- * Use progressive relaxation, biofeedback or visualization.
- * Take pain medication such as aspirin, acetaminophen, ibuprofen or naproxen.
- * Don't focus on negative thoughts. They can affect your mood.

See a doctor if your tension headache doesn't respond to treatment within three days.

Migraine: Results from the expansion and contraction of blood vessels in the head. A migraine is severe pain usually located on one side of the head. The pain can last from a few hours to a couple of days and usually strikes in the morning. It can run in families or be caused by hormonal, weather and eating/sleeping changes or by food triggers.

- * Reduce dairy fat; eat less meat and more fish (including fish oil supplements).
- * Take a hot bath with an ice pack on your head.
- * Any form of aerobic exercise may help prevent migraines.
- * Keep a diary of food triggers.
- * Take magnesium and B vitamin riboflavin.
- * Engage in deep breathing, meditation or guided imagery.
- * Avoid common food triggers such as aged cheese, chocolate, onions and citrus fruits.

See a doctor immediately if your headache is accompanied by slurred speech, numbness/weakness in the arms/legs or it is an unusually severe, sudden head pain.

Sinus Headache: Results from impaired sinus drainage due to a cold, allergies or asthma. A sinus headache is pain around your eyes and up to your forehead.

- * Hot/spicy foods clear sinuses.
- * Drink plenty of fluids including mint tea.
- * Take a hot shower and inhale the vapors or put a hot compress over your sinuses.
- * Avoid smoke and cold, dry air.
- * Decrease milk products. They stimulate mucous production.
- * Take vitamin C.

See a doctor if your sinus infection does not respond to home treatment within a few days or if you develop a fever that exceeds 100 degrees.

Sources: National Headache Foundation, Prevention Magazine, American Association for the Study of Headaches, Blended Medicine by Michael Castleman and Washington and Shady Grove Adventist Hospitals. The Health Tip of the Week is for educational purposes only. For additional information, consult your physician. Please feel free to copy and distribute this health resource.