

How to Care for Your Child with a Headache

This leaflet will provide you with information about headache causes, symptoms, diagnosis, treatment and home care advice.



Headache in Children

Almost all children and teens get headaches at some point. Headaches rarely have a serious cause. Pay attention to your child's symptoms to know if a headache might be a sign of something more problematic.

What are the types of a headache?

Some common types of headaches can be cared for at home, such as:

Tension headaches- involve a band-like pressure on the front and sides of the head and last a few hours or less. Normally they are not severe enough to keep children from doing their everyday activities like going to school.

If your doctor suspects that your child has migraine, then he/she may suggest a certain migraine medicine. Some children with very frequent migraines may benefit from taking medications every day to try to prevent as well as treat their headaches.

Home care advice:

Headache diary: this is useful if your child is getting headache very frequently. Some headaches can be triggered by certain foods or things that children do. We advise you to keep a "headache diary" for your child. In the diary, write down every time your child has a headache and what they ate and did before it started. This way, you can find out if there is anything they should avoid.

Some simple things which can help relieve headache when it happens such as:

- Encouraging your child to relax and breathe deeply.
- Putting a cool, moist cloth across their forehead or eyes.
- Lying them down in a cool, dark, quiet room.

Some simple things which can help to prevent a headache from recurring are:

- Do not use pain medicines for more than two days in a week to avoid getting medicine overuse headache.
- Some common headache triggered by:
 - o Missing meals.
 - o Not drinking adequate fluids.
 - o Having too little or too much caffeine.
 - o Sleeping too much or too little.
 - o Stress.
 - o Certain foods, such as Bologna sausage or hot dogs.
 - o Recreational screen time (Computer, IPAD, mobile devices, video games).

Migraines- throbbing headaches can make a child feel sick (and possibly throw up) and be sensitive to light and sounds. It can be on one side of the head or both. Migraines can cause your child to experience spots and a coloured light on their vision; this usually temporary and resolve after the attack. Your child may feel unwell to do regular activities, like going to school.

Secondary headaches- due to illnesses, such as viral infections, sore throat, colds, or sinus pressure.

Medicine overuse headaches- which can happen in people who use pain medicine too often or for too long for over two days.

In rare cases, a headache is a sign of a more serious problem (such as meningitis, an inflammation of the membranes that cover the brain) or very high blood pressure.

How is a cause of headache diagnosed?

The doctor will ask few detailed questions about your child's health and examine your child. Your doctor will decide if further investigation or blood tests are required. Special tests are not usually needed to diagnose a headache because a serious problem does not cause most headaches in children.

It's important to remember that symptoms can change, and you should continue to watch your child carefully.

How is a headache treated?

In most cases, a child with headache, including tension headache, respond to simple measures and pain medicines.

If your doctor advises giving medicine for pain, you can give

- Paracetamol or Ibuprofen (any brand).
- Follow the instruction on the medicine package for the correct dose for your child.
- Do not give your child Aspirin as this can cause serious complications.

When should I seek medical advice?

Seek medical advice if your child:

- Gets headaches more than once a month.
- Has a headache and is younger than six years old.
- Has certain medical conditions, such as sickle cell disease, bleeding problems, immune system problems, genetic problems, heart problems, or cancer.

Go to the Emergency Department if your child's headache:

- It starts after a head injury
- Wakes them up from sleep
- It is sudden and severe and happens with other symptoms, such as:
 - o Vomiting.
 - o Neck pain or stiffness.
 - o Double vision or changes in vision.
 - o Confusion.
 - o Loss of balance.
 - o Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher.