

# Ways to Prevent and / or Relieve a Throbbing Headache

People have been looking for – sometimes praying for – relief from headache pain for almost as long as heads have been aching. Back in the Middle Ages, when people thought demons in the brain caused headaches, treatment consisted of boring a small hole in the skull. Fortunately, doctors understand headaches much better today and suggest less drastic remedies.

Not all headaches are alike. Tension or muscular headaches are the most common. Unconscious tensing of the face, neck, or scalp muscles, produces a dull, relentless ache. You feel the pressure in your forehead, temples, or around the back of the head, where the muscles of your upper back attach. Lack of sleep or the stress of everyday hassles can trigger tension headaches. Doing tedious work or reading frequently causes muscular headaches.

Migraine headaches are more common among women, tend to run in families, and are more debilitating. A migraine usually originates on one side of the head and throbs. Narrowing and widening of the blood vessels in the head causes migraines. Vomiting, nausea, blurred vision, flashing spots, sensitivity to light, and ringing in the ears often accompany migraines.

Sinus headaches are characterized by pain over the sinuses of the face, in the area of your upper cheekbones, forehead and the bridge of your nose. Inflammation and fluid buildup cause the pain and bending over or touching the affected area seems to aggravate it. Colds, allergies, air pollution, and other respiratory problems can trigger a sinus headache.

## For on-the-spot headache relief:

1. •Rest in a quiet, dark room with your eyes closed.
2. •Massage the base of your head with your thumbs. Start under your ears and work back towards the center of your head. Also, gently massage both temples, your shoulders, neck, and jaw.
3. •Take a warm bath or shower.
4. •Place a cold or warm washcloth or over-the-counter (OTC) hot or cold pack (whichever feels better) over the area that aches.
5. •Take an OTC medicine for pain as directed on the label.
6. •Practice a relaxation technique (e.g., visualize a serene setting, meditate, or do deep breathing).

## To prevent headaches from recurring:

1. •Try to anticipate when pain will strike. Keep a headache journal that records when, where, and why headaches seem to occur.
2. •Note early symptoms. Try to stop a headache as soon as it begins.

3. •Exercise regularly. (This seems to keep headaches at bay.)
4. •Avoid foods that are headache triggers for you.

### **Foods and drinks that may cause headaches include:**

1. •Alcoholic beverages, especially red wine.
2. •Aspartame (an artificial sweetener).
3. •Bananas (if more than 1/2 banana per day).
4. •Caffeine (from coffee, tea, cola soft drinks, chocolate, or some medications) or lack of caffeine if abruptly stopped, such as stopping coffee intake.
5. •Citrus fruit (if more than 1/2 cup per day).
6. •Cured meats (like frankfurters).
7. •Food additives, such as monosodium glutamate (MSG).
8. •Hard cheeses (like aged cheddar or provolone).
9. •Nuts and peanut butter.
10. •Onions.
11. •Sour cream.
12. •Vinegar.

**Note:** See a doctor if you have persistent or recurring headaches or if you have a migraine-like headache for the first time