

Headaches – Charles P. Catania, MD

A Headache is pain or discomfort in the head or face. Headaches vary greatly in terms of the location and intensity of the pain, and how often the headaches occur. The brain tissue doesn't have pain-sensitive nerve fibers and doesn't feel pain. However, other parts of the head can be responsible for a headache including:

- A network of nerves that extends over the scalp.
- Certain nerves in the face, mouth, and throat.
- Muscles of the head, neck, and shoulders.
- Blood vessels found along the surface and at the base of the brain.

There are many different types of headaches which are listed below.

Migraines

A Migraine is an intense, pounding headache. You can get them once or often, and they can last for hours or days. Migraines are more common in women than men.

Tension headaches

Tension headaches often are brought on by stress. They frequently start in the middle of the day. They may be mild or severe and get worse over time.

Sinus headaches

Sinus headaches are caused by sinus pressure. Your sinuses are small, air-filled spaces located behind your nose, cheekbones, and forehead. When your sinuses get irritated by an infection or allergies, these spaces become swollen. This irritation also triggers your sinuses to begin overproducing mucus. Both of these contribute to sinus pressure.

Cluster headaches

A cluster headache is a rare type of headache. Cluster headaches typically start suddenly and occur once or more each day for a period of time. Often, they occur at the same time(s) each day. The period may last days or up to 12 weeks.

On average, each headache lasts about 45 to 90 minutes. The most common times for cluster headaches to occur are between 1 and 2 a.m. and 1 and 3 p.m., and around 9 p.m. Cluster headaches are more common in men than women.

Rebound headaches

People who have problems with medicine or substance abuse get rebound headaches. These headaches occur most days early in the morning. They also are sometimes referred to as medication-overuse headaches.

What Causes Headaches?

The exact cause of headaches varies and is not always known.

Migraines may be caused by changes in body chemicals, genetics, and/or some environmental factors.

Tension headaches are commonly caused by stress, sleep problems, sinus and allergy problems, stiff or sore muscles, brought on by jaw clenching or poor posture, depression, anxiety, hormonal changes in women, certain medicines, and/or certain foods and beverages.

Cluster headaches do not appear to be related to health conditions or diseases of the brain. Some of the triggers of cluster headaches could be certain medicines, such as nitroglycerin, heavy smoking, drinking alcohol, changes in normal sleep patterns, abnormal levels of certain hormones, and/or problems with your hypothalamus, which is the part of your brain that controls your body's "biological clock".

Overuse of medicine is the main cause of rebound headaches. Be careful taking too much of certain medicines. Some of these medications are pain medicines, over-the-counter medicines, sedatives, tranquilizers, ergotamine medicines and other prescription medications.

If you get rebound headaches, these medicines should not be taken more than 2 days a week. Talk with your doctor to find out if you should stop taking these medicines altogether.

Reducing Headaches

There are ways to reduce your risk of a headache or at least make it less severe. Following these tips and maintaining a healthy lifestyle is a good start.

Sleep - Most adults need approximately 6-8 hours of sleep per night. Go to bed and wake up at regular times each day. Do not sleep excessively on the weekends and too little on the weekdays.

Diet - Eat regular meals three times each day including protein, fruits, vegetables and carbohydrates. Low blood sugar can trigger a headache. Avoid excessive amounts of ordinary sugars. Rapid changes in blood sugar may provoke a migraine. Avoid excessive amounts of processed foods.

Exercise - Moderate exercise three to five times each week for 30 minutes will help reduce stress and keep you physically fit and alter the body chemicals that cause and prevent a headache. Too much exercise or certain types of exercise such as weightlifting and running, or inconsistent patterns of exercise may trigger a headache.

Hydration - A normal adult should drink about eight glasses of water throughout the day. Dehydration may cause headaches.

Limit Caffeine and Alcohol - Caffeine is a stimulant and caffeine withdrawal may cause headaches when blood levels of caffeine drop. As little as two 6-ounce cups of home-brewed coffee or three cans of cola can be enough to influence a headache. Alcohol may be a trigger for headaches. This may be different for different people. Some are more sensitive to red wine or hard liquor than other beverages, for example. Evidence also shows that consuming alcohol in moderation may reduce the number of headaches.

Reduce Stress - Stress is the number one trigger for a migraine. Relaxation and stress management may help reduce headaches. Meditation and other deep relaxation exercises can be especially useful. Training in Biofeedback and other behavioral-based therapies are as effective as medication.

Treatment

The goal of treatment is to stop headaches from occurring. Effective headache management depends on finding what type of headache you have and may include avoiding known triggers, such as certain foods and beverages, lack of sleep, and fasting. Also, changing eating habits and daily exercise. Resting in a quiet, dark environment. Medicines, as recommended by your healthcare provider and stress management.

Migraine and cluster headaches may need specific medicine management including:

Abortive medicines - Medicines prescribed by your healthcare provider act on specific receptors in nerves and blood vessels in the head to stop a headache in progress.

Rescue medicines - Medicines bought over the counter, such as pain relievers, to stop headaches.

Preventive medicines - Medicines prescribed by your healthcare provider taken daily to reduce the onset of headaches.

Some headaches may need immediate medical attention including hospitalization for observation, diagnostic testing, or even surgery. Treatment is individualized depending on the underlying condition causing the headache. Full recovery depends on the type of headache and other medical problems that may be present.

If you are experiencing headaches, please call your PentaHealth provider and schedule an appointment to discuss the issue. We always look forward to seeing you at a PentaHealth location for any of your health concerns. Remember we have Walk-In Hours at most of our office locations and we see patients on Sundays in our PentaHealth Today Clinic. Please refer to our website for office times. We take pride in wanting to care for you and your loved ones when you need care, so call us first 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

Dr. Charles P. Catania, is the Medical Director for PentaHealth, he is Board Certified in Family Medicine and Hospice Medicine. He received his medical degree from the American University of the Caribbean School of Medicine; medically trained in England; and completed residency at Underwood Memorial Hospital in Woodbury, New Jersey, where he was named Chief Resident in 2009 and served on the New Jersey Academy of Family Physicians Board of Directors.

Dr. Catania has been in a private practice setting since 2010 and has been named “Readers’ Choice Top Doc” in South Jersey Magazine in August 2013, and “Top Doc” by his peers in Mainline Today Magazine in 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Dr. Catania has an interest in all facets of family medicine. He enjoys spending time and getting to know his patients on a personal level and providing care when they need it most. He loves working our walk-in hours and in our PentaHealth Today clinic on Sundays.

He treasures time with his wife and children, and he takes pride in bringing a very personal and friendly experience when caring for his patients here at PentaHealth.



Dr. Charles P. Catania

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