

Headaches: What You Need to Know

Headaches are common and constitute a significant medical problem for many people. There are many different types of headaches and a given person may suffer from more than one type. Common examples of headaches include:

1. **Tension headaches** - tend to occur in a "band" distribution around the head or in the temples. They usually improve with relaxation and/or anti-inflammatory medications (e.g., aspirin) or acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol). Stress is the usual cause of these headaches.
2. **Sinus headaches** - tend to occur in the area of the face around the eyes, such as in the cheeks or forehead. These headaches may be associated with nasal symptoms, such as nasal stuffiness, and they tend to respond to medications that contain a decongestant combined with an aspirin-like compound or acetaminophen. These headaches may be brought on by things like barometric pressure or weather changes.
3. **Migraine headaches** - tend to occur on one side of the head, though they occasionally can affect both sides of the head at the same time. The headache is frequently preceded by an "aura," which is a visual or auditory (sound) sensation. The headache sufferer may be able to stop the onset of the headache if medication is taken at the time of the aura. Patients may also experience nausea, sensitivity to light or sound, and visual disturbance with the migraine headache. The headache pain is usually very intense. Certain ingested substances can bring on migraine headaches. This does not represent a true "allergy" rather a "chemical sensitivity".

a. Amines found in:

Wine/Beer */Port	Avocados	Bananas
Tuna**	Tomatoes	Berries
Bacon/Sausages	Figs	Cantaloupe
Liver/Liverwurst	Chocolate	Oranges
Pickles	Herring	Grapefruit
Marinated Foods	Canned fish	Tangerines
Ripened Cheeses***	Lima Beans	Sauerkraut

* Some beer may be more headache-inducing than others. Micro-brewery beers may be more of a problem than mass-produced pasteurized canned beers.

** Any fish that is not properly handled or is too old may be a problem. In Colorado, even the best efforts may not be enough to ensure that fish arrives at the grocery store or restaurant in a fresh state. Remember: truly fresh fish does not smell "fishy." Any fish that is less than fresh is capable of causing headache problems in susceptible people.

*** Aged cheeses include: Cheddar, Swiss, Brie, Blue, Roquefort, Gruyere, and anything with visible mold similar to Roquefort.

- b. Caffeine in coffee, tea, cola drinks, chocolate, cocoa and other caffeinated soda pop (check label).

- c. Nitrites in bacon, hot dogs, sausages, lunchmeats. Most of these meat products are also on the "amine" list above.
- d. MSG in Chinese (and other Asian) restaurant foods, canned soups, dry soup mixes, gravy and sauce mixes, meat tenderizers, seasoning mixes, canned or frozen meals (especially anything containing meat or cheese flavors), cheese-flavored sauces (such as nacho sauce in restaurants and movie theaters). In general, soups that do not contain MSG will say so on the front of the label such as "No MSG." If the soup does not state "No MSG," then assume it is there.
- e. Sulfites in:

Wine, Beer, Champagne	White grape juice	Dried fruits
Some canned fish	Fresh grapes	Potato dishes
Shrimp (fresh/canned/frozen)	Lemon/Lime drinks (non frozen)	(on salad bar)

- f. Alcoholic beverages. Also, avoid sauces for foods prepared with alcoholic beverages, as the alcohol may not completely evaporate in cooking.
 - g. Medications, especially birth control pills and replacement estrogen used in post-menopausal women, can cause migraine headaches. Alterations in sleep habits may predispose to migraine headaches. For example, it has been shown that a person who gets up at regular hours during the work week, then sleeps late on the weekends, will have an increased probability of getting a weekend migraine headache. Flashing lights or other visual stimuli may lead to migraine headaches. Food allergy occasionally may cause migraine headaches.
4. **Cervical Spondylitis** - headaches are usually worse in the morning. Pain commonly occurs in the back of the neck and radiates to the back and top of the head towards the eyes. There may be a history of trauma (e.g., whiplash).
 5. **Air-borne chemicals** - such as those found in the workplace or in the home, including cleaning agents, detergents, perfumes, scents from flowers, and cigarette smoke, may cause headaches. It is important to note that one must separate chemical responses from learned responses; the latter is associated with "conditioning response" associated with re-exposure to an odor.
 6. **Temporal-mandibular joint (TMJ) dysfunction** - headaches often occurs in the temples, but can cause generalized facial pain. This problem occurs because of misalignment of the temporal bone with the lower jaw bone (this joint is located on both sides of the head in front of the ears). There may be a "clicking" of the jaw when chewing or with widely opening and closing the mouth. Patients may notice "popping" or "pressure" in their ears. Some patients may have abnormal alignment of their teeth, or may grind their teeth at night.

In order to diagnose what type of headache is present, a careful history is taken. Laboratory tests can be done to confirm the likelihood that a certain type of headache is present or to rule out certain causes of headaches. If an ingested substance or medication is suspected as a cause of a migraine headache, elimination of that factor is recommended.