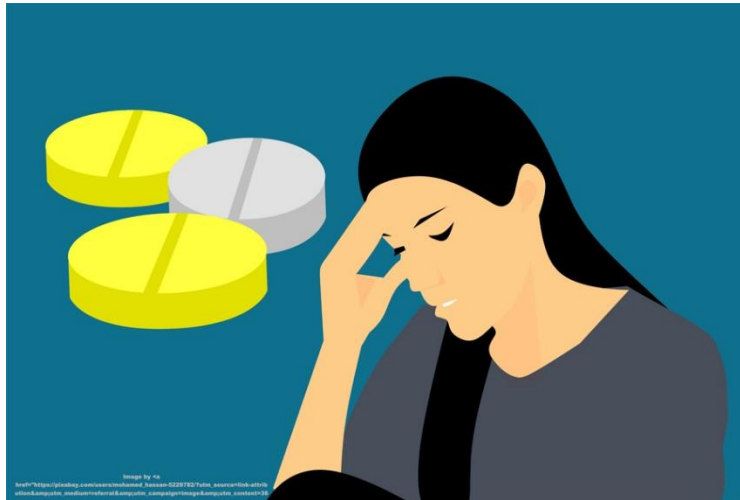


## HEADACHE



By: Dr. Neha S Ramjuttun

What is a headache? A headache is a pain in any area of the head. Its onset, duration, and severity vary. Headache is classified into two categories - primary and secondary.

What are the causes of a headache? Common primary headaches include migraine, cluster headache, and tension headache. Other types of primary headaches include exertional headache, cough headache and headaches related to lifestyle factors such as stress, poor posture, skipped meals, alcohol, lack of sleep and some food.

Common secondary headaches include acute sinusitis, brain cancer, blood clot in the brain, high blood pressure, brain aneurysm, ear infection, dental infection, meningitis, giant cell arteritis, concussion, dehydration, encephalitis, toxoplasmosis, hangovers, glaucoma, certain medications, panic attacks, stroke, pseudotumor cerebri, hematoma in the brain, subarachnoid hemorrhage, carbon monoxide poisoning, headaches post spinal anesthesia, caffeine withdrawal, ice cream headaches, and trigeminal neuralgia.

When to worry? When experiencing a headache, we may not be aware to what extent it may be considered serious. The following are situations when one has to be concerned: a sudden severe headache; headache that increases with exertion; new headaches after 50 years old;

headaches that change in intensity when changing position; headache that affects neurological function; headache that is accompanied with changes in behavior; worsening headache; headaches that come with symptoms like fever, nausea, vomiting, neck stiffness, confusion, numbness, slurred speech, weakness, dizziness, blurry vision, loss of consciousness, or seizures; headaches that present with painful red eye; headaches after a blow or injury to the head; and headaches that affect daily activities.

Diagnosis: For severe cases, depending on the possible cause, some diagnostic tests may be performed such as blood tests, urinalysis, sinus x-ray, CT scan, MRI, lumbar puncture and ophthalmology check-up. A proper neurological examination would be performed as well.

What is the treatment? The treatment would depend on the type of headache. A migraine is treated with a hot or cold compress along with over-the-counter drugs such as acetaminophen, aspirin, and ibuprofen. Tension headaches are treated similarly with over-the-counter drugs such as aspirin, ibuprofen, and acetaminophen. Cluster headaches are treated with oxygen and triptans such as sumatriptan.

What are some home remedies one may try? The remedies that one may try for headaches are - drinking plenty of fluids; decrease intake of alcohol; getting enough sleep; applying cold compress; taking magnesium supplements; making use of essential oils; avoiding strong smells; taking Vitamin B-complex supplements; avoiding foods that are high in histamine; taking coenzyme Q10 supplements; avoiding food that may trigger your headaches; trying out acupuncture; drinking caffeinated tea/coffee; ginger tea; trying out herbals; doing yoga and meditation; exercise; and avoiding food that are high in nitrates/nitrites such as hot dog, bacon and sausages.

Are there any associated complications? Complications may exist with migraines such as migrainous infarction, status migrainous, stroke, migralepsy (seizure triggered by a migraine) and mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, panic disorder, and agoraphobia.

Generally, a headache can be treated at home with remedies and over-the-counter drugs but in situations where a headache is not getting any better or if it is accompanied by other manifestations then it is advisable to consult a medical professional.

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