

## DESCRIPTION

Tension headaches are the most common type of headache.

## FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Dull, steady pain on both sides of the head. The pain may be mild to severe. It usually comes on gradually.
- Tight feeling or tenderness in the muscles of the head, neck, or scalp. "Like a band around the head."
- Migraines may cause intense pain, usually on one side of the head, light sensitivity and mild nausea. Tension headaches may also cause nausea but are different from migraines.

## CAUSES MAY INCLUDE

- A stressful event.
- Eating certain foods.
- Not eating on time; caffeine withdrawal.
- Intense physical exercise.
- Taking certain medications.
- Hormone changes in women.
- Eyestrain.
- Fatigue.
- Having a cold or the flu.

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Most tension headaches can be relieved with treatment.

## POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- None expected for a simple headache.
- Chronic tension headaches may require trying several types of treatment. The headaches may continue if the risk factors are not changed or treated.

## GENERAL MEASURES

- Self-care may include: mild pain relievers; relaxation techniques; hot and/or cold compresses (whichever feels better) over the aching area.
- Self-care is often effective for handling the headache. If that doesn't work, or the pain gets worse, or headaches occur often, see your health care provider.
- Chronic tension headaches may be treated with different methods for stress reduction and relaxation techniques, and prescribed drugs. Medications that have been overused for headache pain may need to be withdrawn.

## MEDICATIONS

- You may take over-the-counter pain relievers such as ibuprofen, naproxen, aspirin, or acetaminophen. (Do not give aspirin to children).
- Stronger medications, for pain, and medications to prevent chronic tension headaches may be prescribed.

## SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF

- Worsening headache
- Headache becomes suddenly severe
- Fever or stiffness in neck
- Vomiting
- Changes in vision
- Dizziness or fainting
- Numbness, tingling or weakness