

Headache

Most headaches are temporary and are caused by tension of the muscles in the forehead and back of the head, or from fatigue, eye strain or emotional upset. Some may be due to infection, injury, allergy, eye, ear or nose disorders, or other problems. A headache that happens without other symptoms and disappears over several hours is probably not a cause for concern.

Migraine headaches are severe, throbbing headaches. We think that migraines result from narrowing and swelling of the blood vessels in the head. Most people also have nausea, vomiting, and cannot tolerate light or noise. Migraines may last from a few hours to days. Treatment includes headache medication and avoiding things that trigger attacks.

HOW TO CARE FOR YOURSELF AT HOME

- + To help get rid of your headache, try some or all of the following measures:
 - Stretch and massage the muscles in your shoulders, neck, jaw and scalp.
 - Take a hot bath.
 - Lie down and place a warm, dry cloth, or a cold wet cloth, or an ice pack wrapped in a towel (whichever feels better) over the aching area.
- + You do not need to restrict your diet, but do not skip meals or delay meals for a long time. Drink plenty of liquids.

- + Avoid alcoholic beverages and cigarette smoking. These often make your headache worse.
- + A good night's sleep is often the best way to get rid of a headache.
- + If you have been given an injection that is a narcotic you should not drive or do anything that requires you to be alert for the next 12 hours.

WHEN TO GET HELP

Go to the nearest Emergency Department if you are experiencing any of the following:

- + You are drowsy or have mental confusion.
- + You develop severe nausea and vomiting.
- + You develop any numbness or weakness on your face, arms, or legs (especially if one-sided).
- + You develop any changes in your vision or have loss of vision.

See your family doctor if you are experiencing any of the following:

- + Your headache gets worse or lasts longer than usual.
- + You have a temperature higher than 38.3°C (101°F) that acetaminophen (Tylenol) does not help.
- + You have a stiff neck.
- + If the headache does not respond to medication that normally works for you.

Headache - *Continued*

TO LEARN MORE ASK

- + Your family doctor.
- + HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf or hard of hearing) or go online to www.HealthLinkBC.ca

RECOMMENDED FOLLOW UP

- Follow up with your primary care provider in ____ days.

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Find this information sheet on the BC Emergency Medicine Network website:
www.bcemn.ca/clinical_resource/headache/

bcemn.ca

The information in this document is intended solely for the person to whom it was given by the health care team. This information does not replace the advice given to you by your health care provider.

