

Headache - Muscle Tension

Definition

- Pain or discomfort in the muscles of the scalp
- This includes the forehead to the back of the head

Health Information

Symptoms

- Gives a feeling of tightness in a band around the head.
- The neck muscles also become sore and tight.

Causes

- Overuse of the scalp and neck muscles
- Often from staying in one position for a long time. This can happen when reading or using a computer.
- Other children get muscle tension headaches as a reaction to stress or worry.
- Examples of stress in children are pressure for better grades or family arguments.

Pain Scale

- **Mild:** Your child feels pain and tells you about it. But, the pain does not keep your child from any normal activities. School, play and sleep are not changed.
- **Moderate:** The pain keeps your child from doing some normal activities. It may wake him or her up from sleep.
- **Severe:** The pain is very bad. It keeps your child from doing all normal activities.

Care Advice

1. **Overview:**
 - Muscle tension headaches are the most common type of headache.
 - It's seen in children and adults. Usually doesn't start before 5 years old.
 - They are easy to treat at home.
 - Here is some care advice that should help.
2. **Pain Medicine:**
 - To help with the pain, give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen. Use as needed.
3. **Cold Pack:**
 - Put a cold pack or a cold wet washcloth on the forehead.
 - If the pain is worse somewhere else, put the cold pack there.
 - Do this for 20 minutes. Repeat as needed.
4. **Stretching:**
 - Stretch and rub any tight neck muscles.
5. **Rest:**
 - Lie down in a quiet place and relax until feeling better.

6. Prevention of Muscle Tension Headaches:

- If something bothers your child, help him talk about it. Help him get it off his mind.
- Teach your child to take breaks when he is doing school work. Help your child to relax during these breaks.
- Teach your child the importance of getting enough sleep.
- Some children may feel pressure to achieve more. This may cause headaches. If this is the case with your child, help him find a better balance.

7. What to Expect:

- With treatment, most muscle tension headaches last a few hours.
- Sometimes they last all day, but they go away with sleep.

8. Return to School:

- Children with muscle tension headaches should not miss any school.

Call Your Doctor If

- Headache becomes severe
- Vomiting occurs
- Headache lasts more than 3 days
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

Pediatric Care Advice

Author: Barton Schmitt MD, FAAP

Copyright 2000-2020 Schmitt Pediatric Guidelines LLC

Disclaimer: This health information is for educational purposes only. You the reader assume full responsibility for how you choose to use it. The information contained in this handout should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. Listing of any resources does not imply an endorsement.