

# Headache - Symptom

## Definition

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

## Health Information

### Causes

- **Viral illnesses.** Most headaches are part of a viral illness, especially with colds. Most often, these last a few days.
- **Muscle tension headaches.** Most common type of frequent headaches. Muscle tension headaches give a feeling of tightness around the head. The neck muscles also become sore and tight. Tension headaches can be caused by staying in one position for a long time. This can happen when reading or using a computer. Other children get tension headaches as a reaction to stress or worry. Examples of stress in children are pressure for better grades or family arguments.
- **Migraine headaches.** Severe, very painful headaches that keep your child from doing normal activities. They are throbbing and often occur on one side. Vomiting or nausea is present in 80%. Lights and sound make them worse. Most children want to lie down in a dark, quiet room. Will recur.
- **Head injury.** Pain and tenderness at the site of an injury can last 1 to 2 weeks.
- **Other common causes.** Hunger, hard work or sports, sunlight, coughing.
- **Frontal sinusitis.** Can cause a headache on the forehead just above the eyebrow. Rare before 10 years old because frontal sinus not formed yet. Other sinuses cause face pain, not headache.
- **Serious causes.** Meningitis or encephalitis. Symptoms include a headache, stiff neck, vomiting, fever and confusion.

### 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:**
  - Headaches are very common with some viral illnesses.
  - Headaches also occur after hard exercise, too much sun or fasting too long.
  - Unexplained headaches can occur in children, just as they do in adults.
  - 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.
  - Headaches due to fever are also helped by bringing the fever down.
3. **Food:**
  - Give fruit juice or food if your child is hungry.
  - If your child hasn't eaten in more than 4 hours, offer some food.
  - Reason: Skipping a meal can cause a headache in many children.

4. **Rest:**
  - Lie down in a quiet place and relax until feeling better.
  - Also get enough sleep at night.
5. **Cold Pack:**
  - Use a cold pack or a cold wet washcloth. Put it on the area that hurts the most.
  - Do this for 20 minutes.
6. **Stretching:**
  - Stretch and rub any tight neck muscles.
7. **What to Expect:**
  - Headaches from exercise or too much sun usually go away in a few hours.
  - Headaches with viral infections often go away in 2 to 3 days.
  - Headaches without a cause usually last less than a day.

## 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

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