



Recurrent headaches and migraines Information for parents

Recurrent headaches are common in children. They can start before age five, but are most common around 13 years of age and can usually be treated at home. If the headaches are severe, frequent or causing disruption to normal daily activities, medical help will be needed.

What is a migraine?

Migraine is a type of recurrent headache that is 'primary'. This means that due to a physical cause, such as high blood pressure or brain cancer. It is caused by a change in the way the brain receives and deals with information, such as light or sound and other triggers such as tiredness and caffeine. Migraine often runs in families. Symptoms of migraine in children may be different from adults. Headaches in children tend to affect both sides of the head, be shorter and less severe, and may include vomiting and tummy pain.

What is a tension headache?

This is the most common type of headache. It is usually described as a pain that feels like a tight band around your child's head or a weight on top of it. Your child's neck or shoulder muscles may also hurt. The pain can last from 30 minutes to several days, or may be longer. Tension headache usually caused by stress, worry, depression, or lack of sleep.

What can be done to help my child?

- Receiving the correct diagnosis of a headache can help you to manage your child's headaches
- Keep a record of your child's headaches.
- Identifying the triggers to a headache by keeping a headache diary.

Ten steps to help avoid headaches

1. **Avoid too many painkillers.** Taking pain relief too frequently can cause daily headaches, known as a "rebound headache". Avoid taking pain relief more than twice a week for over four weeks continuously or twice a week for over four weeks. Avoid giving aspirin to children.
2. **Take painkillers early.** If pain killers are needed, they need to be taken as early as possible at the start of a headache
3. **Avoid caffeine.** Avoid any caffeine containing drinks (**any** fizzy drinks, coffee, teas, energy drinks), as they too can cause chronic daily headaches. Most patients' headaches are not related to food, so they can eat chocolate, cheese etc...Unless the headaches are definitely related.

4. **Adopt good sleeping habits.** Bed early, lights out early, most children need over 8 hours sleep. A tired mind is more prone to headaches.
5. **Drink plenty and eat sensibly.** Drink good amounts during the day. Eat healthy food (avoid sugary food and drinks) and avoid missing main meals. Some children need a snack in between meals, and before bed. A tired body is more prone to headaches.
6. **See an optician**, if not recently. Eye strain can cause headaches, or make them worse.
7. **Regular exercise** and reducing over-weight can reduce headaches.
8. **Get on top of stress.** A stressed mind is more prone to headaches. Exams and competitions are stress makers. Some relaxation techniques can be as effective as the medications. It is worth trying this preferably for at least twice a day for ten minutes (speak to your headache specialist).
9. **Treat vomiting.** If nausea and vomiting is a severe, this could be treated with anti-sickness medications, if the symptoms are gradual rather than sudden and severe.
10. **Keeping a diary** of the headaches can be helpful in identifying triggers and monitoring any treatments

Seek medical help, if the headaches are gradually worse, frequently waking the patient at night, causing other funny turns (strange movements, weaknesses or altered awareness or wakefulness), faints or fits.

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Starlight Children's Observation & Assessment Unit Tel: 0161 291 5459
Wythenshawe Hospital
Southmoor Road
Wythenshawe
M23 9LT

Useful Organisations for further information and help :

Migraine Action (Incorporation) www.migraine.org.uk

www.migraineadventure.org.uk for 8-10years

www.migraineexplorers.org.uk for 11-13years

www.migrainenetwork.org.uk for 14-17years

www.migraine.org.uk for an app on migraine

27 East Street, Leicester, LE1 6NB

Tel: 0116 275 8317, Fax: 0116 254 2023, Email: info@migraine.org.uk

Migraine Trust www.migrainetrust.org

2nd Floor, 55-56 Russell Square, London, WC1B 4HP Email:

Tel: 020 7436 1336, Fax: 020 7436 2880 info@migrainetrust.org

World Headache Alliance www.worldheadachealliance.org

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