

What to Know About Headaches/Migraines in Children

Did you know?

- Headaches can be a common problem in children
- Most headaches in children are benign – meaning they are not symptoms of some serious disorder or disease
- Migraine headaches often run in families
- Headaches may interfere with participation in activities and school and can be a significant health problem

Headaches can be divided into two categories, primary or secondary.

- Primary refers to headaches that occur on their own and not as the result of some other health problem. Primary headaches include migraine, tension-type headaches, and cluster headaches.
- Secondary refers to headaches that result from some cause or condition, such as a head injury or concussion, blood vessel problems, medication side effects, sinus disease, infections, or tumors.

What is a tension-type headache?

- These headaches can be either episodic or chronic and may include tightness in the muscles of the head or neck.
- A tension-type headache can last from 30 minutes to several days. The pain usually occurs on both sides of the head, is steady and non-throbbing. Some children describe it as “a band tightening around my head.” The pain is usually mild to moderate in severity. Most of the time, the headache does not affect the person’s activity level.
- Tension-type headaches are usually associated with other symptoms, such as nausea or vomiting. Some people may experience sensitivity to light or sound, but not both.

What is a migraine headache?

- Migraine headaches are recurrent headaches that may or may not be patterned. Some teenage girls have migraine attacks associated with their menstrual cycle. Migraines generally have some of the following symptoms and characteristics:
 - Generally last from 1 to 72 hours. Sleep or medical treatment can reduce this time period.
 - Generally last from 1 to 72 hours. Sleep or medical treatment can reduce this time period.
 - Throbbing or pounding
 - Moderate to severe pain
 - Pain worsens with exertion and may become so severe that it’s difficult or almost impossible to continue with normal activities
 - Nausea, vomiting, and/or stomach pain commonly occur
 - Blurred vision
 - Seeing flashes or spots
 - Dizziness

How Do You Know A Child “Really” Does Have a Headache?

- ✓ They will complain about the pain more than once
- ✓ They sit quietly in a chair
- ✓ May put their head on their desk and close their eyes
- ✓ They do not want to exert themselves
- ✓ They may seem lethargic, fatigued, or disinterested
- ✓ They have nausea, vomiting
- ✓ Light and noise may seem to bother them

What to Do?

- ❖ If you suspect a child has a mild to moderate headache, have them see the school nurse so they can lie down for a while and take medication if appropriate.
- ❖ If you suspect a child has a moderate to severe headache, or is suffering a migraine attack, have them see the school nurse immediately. Contact the child’s parent so they can schedule an appointment with a doctor.

Source: American Headache Society - http://www.achenet.org/resources/headaches_in_children/

Additional Resource: Mayo Clinic - <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/headaches-in-children/basics/definition/con-20034478>