

## Insider tips for handling those horrible headaches

By Aaron Warnick

**Y**ou may feel one coming on, or it might hit you out of the blue. However it starts, a headache can ruin your day.

Headaches can range from mild numbness to a feeling like your head is pounding.

They can last a short or long time, come in clusters or appear as a single occurrence. Scientists have identified about 150 types of headaches.

"Simply put, a headache is pain experienced in the head or face," says Lawrence Newman, MD,

FHAS, director of the Headache Division at New York University's Grossman School of Medicine. "Depending on the

cause of the head pain, the pain may be felt as an ache, pounding, stabbing or pressure-like sensation."

You usually don't need someone to tell you whether you have a headache. You know it when you feel it. But learning why your head



hurts can help you figure out the best treatment or how to prevent one from coming on.

Headaches can be caused by emotional reasons, such as worry or depression or by experiencing a stressful event. They can also have medical causes, such as high blood pressure, a head injury or dehydration. Some people have headaches because they are sensitive to things like light, noise or weather.

Most headaches that people have are primary, meaning that the headache is your main problem. Some primary headaches have simple causes, and others can be chronic conditions that require a doctor's attention. Overactive blood vessels, nerves or brain chemicals can cause primary headaches.

Secondary headaches, in which your headache is triggered by something else, can be caused by health issues ranging from the common cold and seasonal allergies to serious medical conditions.

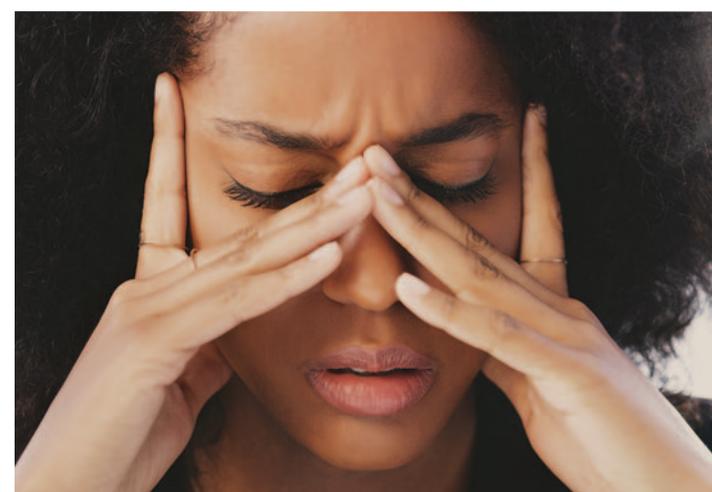
### Identifying the problem

Many headaches can be brought on by things happening around you. Noise is a common cause of headaches, so lower the decibels if you can, move away from the source or wear earplugs. White noise devices can also help drown out annoying sounds, such as street noise.



Another common cause of headaches is light, which can come from many sources. If bright artificial light is a problem, dim the source or look away and shield your eyes, while moving as far from the source as possible. If it's blue light from a computer screen, take a break from the computer for at least 15 minutes. If it's sunlight, wear sunglasses and a hat to shade your eyes.

Sometimes things you eat or drink can cause headaches. Processed meats can cause some people to experience headaches. Sugary drinks, alcohol and caffeine can have strong effects on your



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body, especially if consumed in excess. The best way to avoid those types of headaches is to avoid or cut back on things that cause them.



But it's not just food, drinks or external stimuli that can cause your head to throb. It can also be a signal you're not getting what you need to maintain health and well-being.

Headaches can signal that you're missing out on important food nutrients, restful sleep or proper hydration.

If you feel a headache coming on, think about the foods you have eaten recently, when you last ate, the amount of water you have consumed and how many hours of sleep you are getting each night. If you only slept three hours, skipped breakfast and downed several cups of coffee, you may have found the cause of your headache.

Your sinuses are another likely culprit. Your sinuses surround your eyes and nose, and when they get inflamed, usually through an allergic reaction, the resulting pressure can cause a headache. Headaches from seasonal allergies tend to occur most often in the spring.

If your headaches are frequent or long-lasting, talk to your doctor. You may be suffering from migraines, or something more serious.

People with migraines sometimes experience nausea, vomiting, and light and sound sensitivity.



Migraine headaches can last for hours or days, causing you to lose time from work, school or other important everyday activities.



### Don't ignore these headaches

Most headaches go away on their own or with over-the-counter pain relief medications. If they don't, you should talk to your doctor. In particular, seek help if you have:

- ◆ Severe headaches that occur rapidly or don't respond to pain relief medications.
- ◆ Frequent headaches that interfere with your regular daily activities.
- ◆ Headaches that come after physical exertion, such as exercise or sexual activity.
- ◆ Headaches after a head injury.
- ◆ Headaches associated with numbness, weakness, or speech and vision loss.
- ◆ Reoccurring headaches that start after age 50.



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