

## MEDICAL MONDAYS | News Notes

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**TOPIC: Migraine 101**

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### Migraines Overview

Migraines and other types of headaches, such as tension headache and sinus headache, are painful. Migraine symptoms include a pounding headache, nausea, vomiting, and light sensitivity and are treated with anti-nausea drugs and abortive or preventive medications. Headache remedies include pain relievers.

#### Migraine and Headache Symptoms

There are many different types of headaches. Although not all headaches are the same, they all share at least one thing in common -- they cause pain. But many headaches also cause other unwanted symptoms, including nausea and vomiting. This article addresses the most common headache symptoms associated with the different types of headaches.

#### Tension Headaches

People with tension headaches commonly report these symptoms:

- Episodic Tension Headaches (occur less than 15 days per month)
  - Pain is mild to moderate, constant band-like pain or pressure
  - Pain affects the front, top or sides of the head.
  - Pain usually begins gradually, and often occurs in the middle of the day
  - Pain may last from 30 minutes to several days
- Chronic Tension Headaches (occur more than 15 days per month)
  - Pain may vary in intensity throughout the day, but the pain is almost always present
  - Pain comes and goes over a prolonged period of time
- Associated Symptoms of Tension Headaches include:
  - Headache upon awakening
  - Difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep
  - Chronic fatigue
  - Irritability
  - Disturbed concentration
  - Mild sensitivity to light or noise

- General muscle aching

### Migraines

The symptoms of migraine headaches can occur in various combinations and include:

Moderate to severe pain (often described as pounding, throbbing pain) that can affect the whole head, or can shift from one side of the head to the other

- Sensitivity to light, noise or odors
- Blurred vision
- Nausea or vomiting, stomach upset, abdominal pain
- Loss of appetite
- Sensations of being very warm or cold
- Paleness
- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Fever (rare)
- Bright flashing dots or lights, blind spots, wavy or jagged lines (aura)

### Cluster Headaches

- Intense one-sided pain described as having a burning or piercing quality that is throbbing or constant
- Pain is located behind one eye or in the eye region, without changing sides.
- Pain lasts a short time, generally 30 to 90 minutes (but can last for three hours); the headache will disappear, only to recur later that day (most sufferers get one to three headaches and some up to eight per day during a cluster period).
- Headaches occur very regularly, generally at the same time each day, and they often awaken the person at the same time during the night.

### Sinus Headaches

- Deep and constant pain in the cheekbones, forehead or bridge of the nose
- The pain usually intensifies with sudden head movement or straining and usually occurs with other sinus symptoms, such as nasal discharge, feeling of fullness in the ears, fever, and facial swelling.

### Migraine Prevention

If you get these headaches often or have severe ones, avoid the things that you know set them off, called triggers, like specific foods, smells, and alcohol, for example.

You might be able to keep migraines away with a couple other tactics, too:

- Use preventive medications or devices.
- Make lifestyle changes.

When you take medication to prevent migraines, keep these tips in mind:

- Your doctor will likely start you on a low dose and gradually increase it over time. It may take several months to find the best dose with the fewest side effects.
- Don't suddenly stop taking preventive medications. That could trigger a rebound headache. If you do need to stop taking them, you'll need to gradually taper off under your doctor's care.
- These meds probably won't completely get rid of your headaches. You may still need to take medicine when you do have one.

If you can't take medications or don't want to, you might want to think about using a device to keep migraines away. Cefaly is the first FDA-approved device for preventing migraines in people over age 18. It's a portable headband-like tool that gives electrical pulses through the skin of the forehead. They stimulate a nerve that's linked with migraine headaches. You use it once a day for 20 minutes, and when it's on, you'll feel a tingling or massaging sensation on your forehead.

### Lifestyle Changes

Your everyday habits can go a long way to help you have fewer, less-severe migraines. Some things that may help include:

- Sleep - Go to bed and get up about the same times every day, including on weekends and holidays. When you hit the sack at random times or you get too much or too little shut-eye, that can trigger a headache.
- Exercise regularly - You may be tempted to avoid being active, afraid it might trigger a migraine. Overdoing a workout may trigger a headache for some people, but research suggests regular, moderate aerobic exercise may make migraines shorter, less severe, and happen less often for many people. It also helps control stress, another trigger.
- Eat regular meals - A drop in blood sugar can set off a migraine, so keep it steady by not skipping meals. Also, drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration, which can trigger the headaches.
- Limit stress - Tension's a common trigger. So, take time each day to relax. You could:
  - Listen to calming music.
  - Take a short walk.
  - Meditate.
  - Do yoga.

Try complementary techniques. Along with your prescribed treatment, you might want to try one of these to help prevent migraines, such as:

- Acupuncture
- Massage
- Talk therapy