

Headache Help for Your Child or Teen

How to avoid headaches

- Get enough sleep – most people need 8 to 10 hours a night
- Eat meals at regular times and avoid skipping meals (especially breakfast)
- Exercise for 20 to 30 minutes each day
- Drink plenty of water to stay well hydrated
- Avoid frequent use of caffeine in drinks and foods

Headache triggers

Things that often cause headaches are called “triggers.” It is important for your child or teen to watch out for triggers and to avoid them when they can. There are lots of kinds of triggers. They can come from foods or smells, or from stress or not getting enough sleep. A list of triggers and things that your child or teen can do to avoid them begins on page 3 of this flyer.

Ways to treat headaches without medicine



There are many ways to treat headaches. It is best to treat headaches without medicine, if possible. Headache medicine can cause problems if your child or teen takes it too often (more than 2 to 3 times per week). Here are some ways to treat headaches without using medicine:

- **Managing stress and learning to relax.** There are many ways to deal with stress, like meditation or yoga, massage, writing in a journal, counseling and others. Even a hot or cold pack might help. Ask your child’s or teen’s provider about options.
- **Drinking plenty of water,** until your child’s or teen’s urine is clear. Ask your child’s or teen’s healthcare provider if you are not sure how much water they should be drinking.
- **Other therapies.** Ask us about therapies that might be appropriate for your child or teen, such as biofeedback, cognitive behavior therapy (CBT), acupuncture or massage therapy. These therapies can help teach relaxation techniques and help with stress.
- **Keeping a regular daily schedule.** Make sure your child or teen keeps going to school, doing hobbies and daily activities. Keeping a routine is good, but it is also important for them not to try to do too much.

To Learn More

- Neurology
206-987-2078
- Ask your child’s healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.



Treating headaches with medicine



Sometimes, headaches are bad enough that your child or teen will need to take medicine. There are two kinds of headache medicine.

One kind of headache medicine is preventive (prophylactic). This kind of headache medicine is taken daily to stop headaches before they start. Not all people need to take preventive headache medicine. We can talk to you about this kind of headache medicine and order this kind of medicine with a prescription if appropriate.

Another type of headache medicine is the kind your child or teen takes when the headache happens. This is called rescue or abortive medicine. These kinds of headache medicines are also called “pain relievers.” It is best to take pain relievers within 20 to 30 minutes after the headache starts. This is because these medicines work better if they are taken soon after the headache starts. Most pain relievers can be bought without a prescription. Use this medicine only if recommend by your child’s healthcare provider. Check with the healthcare provider first before giving any type of medicine to your child.

It is important not to use pain relievers more than 2 to 3 times per week. If your child or teen takes headache medicine more often than this, the medicine can start to cause headaches. These are called “rebound headaches” or “medication overuse headaches.”

Pain relievers that your child or teen may take for bad headaches include the following options:

Over the counter

- Ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), as recommended
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol), as recommended
- Other NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) such as naproxen (Aleve), as recommended
- Excedrin Migraine (this has caffeine and aspirin so should not be taken more than 2 times per week and should not be taken for a fever or flu-like illness), as recommended
- Caffeine can be a very helpful treatment for headaches, but only if you do not usually have it. (No more than 2 doses a week.) However, if you regularly have caffeine, it is not effective and can trigger rebound headaches.

Prescription

- Triptans include: sumatriptan (Imitrex), zolmitriptan (Zomig), rizatriptan (Maxalt), almotriptan (Axert) and others
- NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs): ketorolac (Toradol) and others

Other ways to treat headaches

One kind of preventive treatment for headaches is the use of natural vitamins, minerals, enzymes or herbal remedies. These work best when your child or teen takes them every day. It may take up to 3 months of regular daily use to get the best results. Use these treatments only if recommended by your healthcare provider.

Supplements are not regulated by the FDA, so it is best to use supplements from a reliable source. Look for “Consumer Lab certified” or “USP verified” on the product labeling when looking for reliable sources of supplements. Check with your healthcare provider first before giving any type of medicine or supplement to your child.

Some examples that may be helpful for migraine headaches are:

- Riboflavin (vitamin B2): Usually 400 mg per day for teenagers. This dose will make urine bright yellow, but does not have many other side effects for most people.
- Magnesium: There are many different forms of magnesium, including magnesium oxide, chelated magnesium, magnesium protein complex and several others. We do not know which form is best, but we do recommend avoiding magnesium supplements designed to treat constipation to avoid causing diarrhea. The usual starting dose is 100 to 300 mg of elemental magnesium per day for teenagers (about 5mg/kg per day). Look for the dose of “elemental magnesium” in each tablet on the package or ask the pharmacist for help to find the dose that is recommended by your provider. You should not use magnesium supplements outside of a doctor’s care if you have kidney problems.
- Co-enzyme Q10: The dose range is usually 30 to 100 mg per day for teenagers (1 to 3 mg/kg)

Combination pills

There are several options that combine supplements. Some examples are:

- Migrelief: Combination of 360 mg magnesium, 400 mg riboflavin and 100 mg feverfew
- Children’s Migrelief: Combination of 180 mg magnesium, 200 mg riboflavin and 50 mg feverfew
- HeadacheFree: Combination of 200 mg magnesium and 200 mg riboflavin

Headache triggers

There are many different kinds of things that can cause headaches. Here is a list of different kinds of triggers and some of the things that you and your child or teen or can do about them.

Rest and activity

If your child or teen does not have a regular sleeping or exercise schedule, they may be more likely to get headaches.



Trigger

What your child or teen can do

Not getting regular sleep - Sleeping too little or too much

Go to bed and get up at the same time each day

Plan to get 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night

Take computer and TV out of bedroom or at least turn them off, including cell phones, at least 30 minutes before bed.

Sleep the same amount each night. Avoid sleeping more on weekends and less during the week.



Not doing regular activity or exercise - Exercising too much or not enough

Aerobic exercise at least 3 to 4 times a week to help lessen stress and keep in shape. Moderate exercise, like walking, running, biking, or other kinds of activities like these are best.

Too much exercise or big changes in how often you exercise may trigger headaches.

Things in your child's or teen's space

Sometimes, outside factors (things in your child's or teen's environment) can cause a headache. Some of these are easier to control than others.

Trigger

What your child or teen can do

Temperature - Feeling too cold or too hot

Wear layers

Noise - Being around loud noises

Avoid loud music or other sounds

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Light - Looking at bright light

Limit video games, television and computer time.

Smell - Smelling strong scents or odors

Avoid perfume or cologne

Eating and drinking

Headaches can also be made worse (exacerbated) by your child's poor or irregular eating habits.

Trigger

What your child or teen can do

Skipping meals (especially breakfast) – Going for too long without food can cause headaches

Schedule meals at regular times. Eat breakfast, a morning snack, lunch, an afternoon snack, dinner.

Not eating balanced meals at regular times every day

For more information about balanced meals, make an appointment with a dietitian. You can also visit www.usda.gov to learn more about healthy eating.

Not drinking enough water – Not enough water can make headaches worse

Drink enough water so that urine is clear or very light in color. Generally around 8 glasses or 64 ounces a day for teens.

May need to drink more when the weather is hot or during exercise

Caffeine – Food and drink with caffeine can help a headache at first, but in the long run, frequent uses causes headaches much more than it helps them

Avoid food and drinks with caffeine (list below).

Every once in awhile, it is OK to take medicine with caffeine in it, but it is best to avoid regular use in food and drink.

Food or food additives

Avoid trigger foods when possible (list below)

Food and drinks with caffeine:

- Coffee
- High-caffeine sodas or colas like Mountain Dew
- Hot chocolate
- Decaffeinated drinks of any kind (still contains a small amount of caffeine)

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- Chocolate candies
- Energy drinks

Foods that can trigger headaches in some people:

- Aged or hard cheese (like cheddar and parmesan)
- Citrus fruits (like oranges and grapefruit)
- Chocolate
- Yogurt
- Fried foods (like French fries)
- Processed or cured meats (like salami, bacon, hot dogs and pepperoni)
- Foods with artificial sweetener (aspartame) such as Splenda, Equal and NutraSweet
- Alcohol

Other kinds of triggers

These are a few other things that can trigger headaches. Some are easier to control than others.

Trigger

What your child or teen can do

Feeling stressed out. Feeling stress or anxiety can cause headaches. It can happen while feeling stress or afterward

Ways to manage stress: biofeedback, cognitive behavior therapy (CBT), acupuncture, massage, exercise. Talking about it or getting counseling

Traveling. Being away from home can influence a lot of things that might trigger headaches. It can make regular eating and sleeping hard, and can cause stress

Planning ahead, having snacks and food available.

Having a menstrual period. Migraines can happen within 48 hours of your teen starting their monthly period

Talk to their provider about treatment options.

When a headache starts

It is a good idea for your child or teen to keep a headache diary. They should list all headaches, when they happen, and how long they last. They should also write a few notes about what might have caused them or helped them to go away. Talk to your child's or teen's provider to see if they should record anything else in the headache diary.

Call your child's or teen's healthcare provider if the headache gets worse, happens more often or feels different from other headaches. For example, it is important to call your child's or teen's healthcare provider if:

- It is the worst headache your child or teen has had in their life
- It awakens them from sleep
- They have seizures
- They have a stiff neck with fever
- They are not able to move, think or respond as they usually do

If your child or teen gets a mild headache:

1. Your child or teen should rest, use relaxation techniques, and put a cold compress on their head.
2. Use to help with pain: (use pain reliever no more than 2 times each week):

If your child or teen gets a moderate or very bad headache:

1. Your child or teen should rest, use relaxation techniques, and put a cold compress on their head.
2. Use to help with pain (use pain relievers no more than 2 times each week):

3. For nausea/vomiting:

4. Other instructions:

If headache is still moderate or bad 2 hours later:

5. Repeat:

6. Also do:

Recommended reading and resources



MigraineBuddy

- “Depression: Facts for Families” seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE1287.pdf
- “Headaches” kidshealth.org/en/parents/headache.html
- Headache Relief Guide (website) headachereliefguide.com/
- “Managing Your Child’s Chronic Pain” by Dr. TM Palermo and EF Law (available for loan from the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201)
- “Migraine Buddy” (app) migrainebuddy.com