

# TO YOUR HEALTH

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## Heads Up

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Virginia Woolf famously wrote in her essay *On Being Ill*, “the merest schoolgirl, when she falls in love, has Shakespeare and Keats to speak for her; but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry.” Emily Dickinson described her headaches as a “Funeral in her brain.”

Headaches are one of the most common disorders and according to the WHO at least 50% globally suffer from a headache at least once a year.

Whether they are throbbing, sharp, dull or constant, headaches have a debilitating effect on our lives. There are over 150 different types of headaches, categorized as primary and secondary.

Primary headaches include Cluster and Tension headaches, New Daily Persistent Headache (NDPH) and Migraines. Secondary headaches involve medication overuse, high blood pressure, tumors, trauma and head injuries.



- Cluster headaches appear in groups and are the most severe of the primary constellation. They last from two to twelve weeks and are seasonal, making an appearance in the spring and the fall. These headaches appear behind the eye and can throb constantly.

- Migraines are more common among women. Besides pain, other symptoms of a migraine include nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light and light headiness. There are four distinct phases to a migraine, but sufferers may not encounter all of them. A migraine may start with a change in mood and progress to visual sensory and motor symptoms. This phase could include hallucinations and numbness. This could be followed by pain and possibly depression and anxiety. In the final phase the pain diminishes, but it can be replaced with fatigue and irritability.



- Tension headaches are constant but do not throb. They get exacerbated when taking part in activities such as walking up stairs. They are bilateral and can be controlled by medication.
- New daily persistent headaches (NDPH) come on suddenly and can last for three months. They are bilateral in nature, are constant, and persistent. Sometimes medications are used to control the pain.
- Medication overuse affects about 5% of the population and is the most common type of secondary headache. Also known as a rebounding headache, they are caused by frequently using pain relieving medications for headaches. These headaches tend to occur daily or every other day and normally in the morning. The classic symptoms of rebounding headaches are nausea, restlessness, memory difficulties and irritability.



### **Why does my head hurt?**

Nerves around the scalp, face, mouth and throat send signals to the brain. Muscles around the head, neck and shoulders are also responsible for causing a headache. Interactions between the brain, blood vessels and surrounding nerves trigger actions between the blood vessels and muscles. This sends pain messages to the brain triggering a headache.

### **Food Glorious Food**

According to the Cleveland Clinic most of the information about foods causing headaches is self-reported. Nevertheless, there are certain foods that are often mentioned in these self-reported surveys. Aged cheese like Stilton and Parmesan are triggers for headaches. Alcohol such as red wine, beer and whiskey are other commonly identified beverages that cause headaches. If you enjoy a slice of pizza or tomato-based dishes, be aware that you may end up with a pounding headache. Favorites like chocolate and caffeine also make the list. Chemicals such as tyramine, found in cheese, and nitrates, typically found in processed meat, have been identified as sources of headaches. Avoiding processed foods and eating a well-balanced diet are key elements to fending off a headache.

There are numerous ways to avoid a headache. Besides eating and sleeping well; the American Migraine Foundation advises us to keep hydrated. Drink plenty of water and electrolyte-based beverages. The sun can be a major factor for causing a headache. During sun filled days, wear a hat and sunglasses. Change your exercise routine during hot sunny days.

Headaches are part of everyday life and there is no foolproof way of avoiding them. It remains one of the most common forms of pain we encounter. However, we can be more aware of the sources and adapt our lifestyles accordingly.

### **Over the Counter Hearing Aids**

Over the counter (OTC) hearing aids were approved by the FDA in August 2022. The Reauthorization Act 2017 initiated these changes. They are a less expensive alternative to prescription hearing aids. OTC hearing devices are designed for mild to moderate hearing loss and do not require the assistance of a hearing health care professional. These devices are not designed for children or anyone with severe hearing loss.

The FDA will oversee the safe and effective use of OTC hearing aids. These devices will also have standard package labelling and will include warnings and instructions as to how to use the device. However, as reported on PBS Newshour, the FDA does not have oversight on any return policies. When purchasing these devices consumers should check the return policies.

OTC devices should not be used if there is:

- Fluid in the ear
- Pain
- Vertigo

