

headache

Headache is pain in any area of the head. The character of the pain (sharp, throbbing, dull or aching), and the area of the head affected (over an eye, base of the head or on one side) may vary. There are a number of different causes of headaches. The onset of headaches can also vary and they can be classified as acute or chronic.

A change in the following means you should consult your medical or health professional:

- Occurrence
- Severity
- Type

The causes of headaches can be:

- Tension
- Infections - viral or bacterial
- Trauma to the head
- Fevers
- Allergy reactions
- Liver disturbances
- Diarrhoea
- Blood circulation problems
- Hormone imbalances
- Fatigue
- Stress
- Dehydration
- Insomnia
- Alcohol
- Tobacco
- HIV medications

It is worth remembering that headaches associated with the start of a new HIV medication may decrease and cease with time. If they do not you should consult your medical or health professional. It is important to find the cause of headaches, as they can be a symptom of other serious diseases not associated with HIV. Seek a diagnosis from your medical or health professional to pin point the cause of your headaches.

To assist in the management of headaches try strategies such as:

- Resting in a quiet or dark room, closing your eyes, using cold compresses over painful areas (eyes or forehead), and massaging the temples and the base of your skull using gentle circular movements with your fingers
- Keeping a diary to help identify possible triggers
- Formulating a treatment plan with your medical or health professional
- Keeping the same sleep routine. Try to avoid afternoon naps or sleeping in as this may precipitate headaches

- Considering and correcting your posture - muscle tension can be relieved with heat pads
- Learning some stress management techniques as stress can cause headaches (refer to Emotion link)

To prevent the occurrence of headaches try strategies such as:

- Avoiding or limiting foods known to trigger headaches, particularly caffeine (coffee, tea, and soft drinks), chocolate, red wine, citrus fruit, food additives (like monosodium glutamate - MSG), nuts, and cheeses
- Cutting down and trying to eliminate smoking
- Avoiding alcohol
- Ensuring adequate water intake or weak cordial if you are unable to tolerate water
- Trying acupuncture or acupressure
- Doing moderate exercise daily
- Ensuring you eat small regular meals to maintain blood sugar levels

There are some pharmaceutical medications available over the counter which can help to relieve headaches. Consult your medical or health professional to make sure they do not interact with your other prescribed medications.

Additional supplements:

- **Magnesium** - can influence nerve and muscle transmission, and therefore help with muscle spasms
- **Feverfew** - contains a constituent which reduces spasms

Any additional supplements considered for treatment should be discussed with your medical or health professional as there may be interactions with other medications.

headache (contd.)

The information provided assists in self-management and is intended as recommendations only. For more information please see your medical or health professional.



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