

# SELF CARE

## Headache and migraine

### *The Health Column*

#### Headache and migraine cost over \$1 billion a year

Headaches are common and affect almost everyone at some point in their life.

In **Headache & Migraine Awareness Week**, 11-16 September 2017, Headache Australia, a national charitable organisation dedicated to advocacy, research and education, want to develop greater public awareness of headache disorders. Headache Australia, a division of the Brain Foundation (<http://headacheaustralia.org.au>), is the only Australian organisation that aims to support the more than 5 million Australians affected by headache and migraine.

#### Common causes of headache

There are different types of headaches and it is possible for someone to have more than one type of headache. Common types of headaches include:

- **tension headache** - usually affects both sides of the head and may feel like a tight band across the forehead
- **sinus headache** - can make your forehead, eyes and cheeks feel painful and tender due to blocked sinuses (the spaces between the bones of your face)
- **migraine headache** – a severe headache that usually throbs. It often affects only one side of the head, but it can spread to both sides.



Migraines can be hereditary. A migraine may last from 4 to 72 hours. Migraines affect about 1 in 4 women and about 1 in 12 men and commonly start in childhood or during young adulthood.

#### Common symptoms of migraine

- nausea
- vomiting
- sensitivity to light, noise and smell
- sometimes an aura (e.g. flashing lights, blurred vision, tingling or numbness) up to an hour before the pain starts.

#### Key triggers for headache

- missing meals
- dehydration
- stress
- alcohol
- hormonal changes in women
- high blood pressure
- caffeine withdrawal
- exposure to certain toxins.

## Triggers for migraine

Migraine triggers are very individual, but common causes include:

- fatigue
- foods - like chocolate, citrus fruit, red wine, aged cheese and monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- environmental factors - e.g. flickering light, motion, loud sounds, strong odours.

## Key treatments

Most headaches are harmless and respond to simple treatment measures such as:

- waiting for the headache to go away
- drinking extra water
- rest or sleep
- simple painkillers such as paracetamol
- ibuprofen
- a dark quiet environment.

Occasionally a headache can be a symptom of a serious illness. Doctors and pharmacists can help find the cause of a headache and advise you on treatment options.

To treat recurring migraine, you may need specific pain-relief medicines which your doctor can prescribe for treatment and prevention.

## Tips for headache prevention

- Keep hydrated - drink water throughout the day.
- Eat a balanced diet with regular meals daily.
- Moderate regular exercise.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Avoid drinking alcohol.
- Limit caffeine intake to 1–2 cups per day.

In addition if you get headaches often keep a *food and headache diary* - to work out what the triggers are, so you know what to avoid. **Headache Australia** (<http://headacheaustralia.org.au>) can provide support and links to the headache diary. You can join the National Headache Register if you suffer from chronic headaches or migraines. This gives you access to current headache research and information.

**NPS MedicineWise** is another helpful website that has information for consumers about headaches and migraines. *NPS MedicineWise* can be found at [www.nps.org.au](http://www.nps.org.au)

Your local pharmacy can help as well. Pharmacists are medicines experts. If you have a headache that has lasted for a long time or you don't regularly get headaches, speak to your pharmacist or doctor.

Your pharmacist can give you further information about headaches and migraines as well as different treatment options. Self Care Fact Cards such as *Headache, Migraine* and *Pain relievers* are available from pharmacies providing the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's Self Care health information.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to [www.psa.org.au/selfcare](http://www.psa.org.au/selfcare), then click 'Find a *Self Care pharmacy* near you'.

