

## Let's talk about tension headaches

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## **Tension headaches**

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**By Dr Brighton Chireka**

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We have or we will all experience some form of headache at some point in our lives. Sometimes we panic fearing for the worst when there is no need for that. The headache that the majority of us experience is tension headache. In most cases we do not need to see a doctor if we have occasional episodes of tension headaches. The big question is how do we know that this headache is tension type and when should we seek urgent medical advice ? I hope this article will be able to answer some of these questions.

### **What is tension headache ?**

This is a headache that feels like a constant ache and usually affects both sides of the head . One may feel pressure behind the eyes or tightening of the neck muscles. Some describe it as feeling like a tight band around the head . This headache is mild and does not usually stops you from doing your everyday activities. It usual lasts 30 minutes to several hours but in some instances can last for several days.

Tension headaches are classified as primary headache. This means that they are not caused by an underlying condition. Other primary headaches include cluster headaches and migraines. I am only covering tension headaches for now and will cover the other two in my next articles.

### **When should you seek medical help ?**

There is no need to see a doctor if you get occasional headaches. See a doctor if the headache is now occurring several times a week or if it's getting worse.

**You should seek urgent medical advice if your headache is ;**

- *coming on suddenly and is unlike anything you have had before*
- *Accompanied by a very stiff neck , fever , nausea ,vomiting, seizure, double vision and confusion*
- *happening following an accident especially if it involves a blow to the head*
- *accompanied by weakness, numbness, slurred speech or confusion*

### **What causes tension headaches ?**

We do not know the exact cause but certain things have been shown to trigger tension headaches. These are :

***Dehydration***

***Tiredness***

***Stress and anxiety***

***Poor posture***

***Squinting***

***Missing meals***

***Lack of physical activities***

***Noise***

***Bright sunlight***

***Certain smells***

## **How do we treat tension headaches ?**

These headaches are not serious so they can be managed with simple painkillers or lifestyle changes.

### **What are the lifestyle changes ?**

Relaxation techniques help with stress-related headaches . The techniques include:

Massage

Exercise

Yoga

Even applying a hot flannel to the forehead and neck .

Pain killers should be used for a short time otherwise overuse of them may lead to medication-overuse headaches developing.

<http://docbeecee.co.uk/medication-overuse-headache/>

## **How to prevent tension headaches ?**

It is advisable to keep a diary of your headaches to try identify what could be triggering them. Some people find that they can control their tension headache by altering their diet or lifestyle.

Exercising regularly and relaxing helps to reduce the stress and tension that triggers tension headaches .

Maintaining a good posture and making sure that one is well rested and well hydrated can help in preventing tension headache.

## **Other measures**

Acupuncture has been known to prevent chronic tension headache

Amitriptyline may be use to prevent these headaches and I find it very useful in my patients who have chronic tension headache.

This article was compiled by **Dr Brighton Chireka** , who is a GP and a blogger based in Kent in the United Kingdom. Feel free to contact him at **info@docbeecee.co.uk** and you can read more of his work on his blog at [DR CHIREKA'S BLOG](#)

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