

Tension Headache

DEFINITION

A tension headache is a pain that affects the head as the result of overwork or emotional strain, and involves tension in the muscles of the neck, face and shoulders. It is often described as a painful, band-like sensation around the head.

CAUSES

- Emotional stress
- Fatigue
- Depression

CHARACTERISTICS

- Tension headaches are described as dull, non-pulsating, persistent pain
- Headaches can last from 30 minutes to seven days
- Patients may experience intolerance to either noise or light
- Tension headaches are not associated with nausea or vomiting
- The tension-type headache is generally not aggravated by physical activity.

TREATMENT

- Stretch and massage the muscles in your shoulders, neck, jaw and scalp
- Take a hot bath
- Lie down and place a heating pad, a cold wet cloth or an ice pack over the aching area
- Do not skip meals or delay meals for very long, and drink plenty of fluids
- Avoid alcoholic beverages
- Avoid cigarette smoking
- Try to get a good night's sleep.

CONSIDER NOTIFYING YOUR PHYSICIAN IF...

- Your headache worsens or lasts longer than 24 hours
- You develop a temperature greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit
- You need to take medication to relieve headache pain several times a week.

CALL YOUR PHYSICIAN IMMEDIATELY IF...

- You develop a temperature greater than 102 degrees Fahrenheit
- You develop blurred or double vision
- You begin vomiting
- You develop a stiff neck
- You develop mental confusion or drowsiness.