

Headaches in Children

Headaches are common in children and teens. There are many types of headaches. Each type has their own treatment. Your child's doctor or health care provider will review their history and do a physical exam to see what type(s) of headache they have.

Type of Headache	Common Symptoms
Migraine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong or severe head pain • Pain gets worse from light and sound. • Throwing up (vomiting) • Nausea
Tension	Mild or medium pain feels like a tight band around the head or other areas of the head.
Caused by infection	Head pain along with fever or other sick symptoms.

Treatment

- The best way to treat a mild headache is to rest and relax.
- Place a warm or cold wet washcloth or ice wrapped in a washcloth on the head or back of the neck. Do not put ice directly on the skin.
- Your child can take over-the-counter (OTC) pain medicine for their headache. This includes ibuprofen (Motrin®, Advil®), acetaminophen (Tylenol®), or naproxen (Aleve®). Read the label on the bottle for the right dose and timing for your child.

Record

Keep a record of your child's headaches. This will help the doctor or health care provider with their treatment.

When to Call the Doctor

Call your child's doctor or health care provider if their headaches:

- Wake them up.
- Keep coming back or get worse.
- Include pain in the eye or ear, confusion, nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light and sound, or numbness.
- Are like headaches other family members have had.
- After a head injury and does not go away after 1 week.
- Happens each day, especially if they disrupt school or play.

When to Call 911

Call 911 or take your child to the closest emergency room **right away** if they:

- Seem confused.
- Are very tired or hard to wake up.
- Have a stiff neck or complain of neck pain with their headache, especially with a fever.
- Have sudden, severe head pain for the first time.
- See 2 of the same thing when only 1 is there (double vision).
- Vomit shooting out of their mouth.

Prevention

- Get enough sleep and follow a routine. Your child should go to sleep and wake up at about the same time each day.
- Eat meals at regular times. Do not let them skip meals.
- Drink plenty of liquids, especially water. Sports drinks are also okay.
- Get regular exercise or active play.
- Get your support if they are stressed or upset. Let them talk openly with you so you are aware of what is troubling them.

Some children are sensitive to foods like chocolate, meats made with nitrates (hot dogs, lunch meats, pepperoni, and bacon), foods with monosodium glutamate (MSG), aged cheeses, fried foods, caffeine (coffee, tea, soft drinks with caffeine, and energy drinks). It may help to avoid these foods and see if the headaches go away.

Follow-up

Your child's will have a follow-up with their doctor or health care provider. Bring their headache record with you to the appointment.