



Headaches in children (page 1 of 4)

Headaches in children

Headaches affect people of all ages, and they can be a common symptom in children.

What causes headaches?

Most headaches in children occur on their own (primary headache). Some headaches can be as a result of another medical condition (secondary headache).

Primary headache

The causes of primary headaches are not well understood. The two most common types are a tension headache and migraines.

Tension headaches cause a tightness or pressure around both sides of the head. They are usually not bad enough to stop children from doing daily activities or going to school.

Migraines can start off as a mild headache and then get worse throughout the day. They can be on one side of the head, or sometimes both sides. They can make children feel sick, cause them to vomit or be sensitive to light, sounds, smells. Some can get eye symptoms before a migraine starts, such as seeing funny spots or coloured lines. Migraines can be painful enough to stop children going to school or doing their usual activities.

Secondary headache

Sometimes headaches can go along with mild infections such as a cold or the flu. Rarely headaches can be caused by your child taking pain medicine too often. This is called medication overuse headache. If you are giving your child paracetamol or ibuprofen regularly, over a long period, this could be the cause of the headaches.

In very rare cases headaches can be caused by severe infections around the brain (such as meningitis) or brain tumours.

Paediatric Consultant's Secretaries

 **01722 336262 ext 2200**

If you need this information in another language or medium (audio, large print, etc) please contact Customer Care on 0800 374 208 or send an email to: customer care@salisbury.nhs.uk

You are entitled to a copy of any letter we write about you. Please ask if you want one when you come to the hospital.

If you are unhappy with the advice you have been given by your GP, consultant, or another healthcare professional, you may ask for a second (or further) opinion.

The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

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What can I do to help my child?

Letting them rest in a quiet room can help. Give your child pain relief such as paracetamol or ibuprofen (unless you have been giving these regularly and they are causing the headache).

How to prevent headaches

It is important to make sure your child gets enough sleep, has regular meals and drinks enough fluids, as this can help to prevent headaches. It can be useful to keep a symptom diary (see page 4) to see how the headaches affect daily life.

If your child is having regular migraines the doctor may prescribe other medication for them to help with their symptoms.

When should I seek further advice from a doctor?

If your child has any of the following symptoms it is important to go and speak to your doctor:

- ongoing headache after a head injury
- the headache wakes your child up at night, or there when they wake up in the morning
- headaches that are getting worse
- neck pain
- vomiting
- high fever
- confusion or change in personality
- weakness of their arms/legs or side of face
- changes in vision or problems speaking
- unsteady when they walk
- your child is less than 4 years old.

If your child has any of these symptoms the doctor may then do further tests, such as a blood test or imaging (CT or MRI scan).

If you have any further concerns or questions about your child's headaches please discuss them with your GP or Paediatrician.

Symptom diary (see page 4)

This is to see how often and how severe the headaches are. It is useful to keep the diary both before and after the start of any treatment. This will show if the headache treatment is working. It also helps you remember details about your child's headache so you can show them to your doctor.

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Migraine triggers

Most migraine attacks occur for no apparent reason. However, some things can trigger attacks in some people. These include:

- foods such as cheese, chocolate, citrus fruit, tyramine
- environment such as cigarette smoke, computer screen, hot weather, strong smells
- change in habit such as missing meals, change in sleep pattern
- psychological such as anxiety, depression, stress, tiredness, anger
- other things such as menstrual periods.

Treatment options

- simple pain killers – paracetamol and ibuprofen
- anti-sickness medicines
- Triptan medicines
- avoidance of triggers such as those listed above
- preventative medicines may be useful in some situations.

To find out more information

Children's headaches - live well - NHS choices

www.nhs.uk/Livewell/headaches/Pages/Headachesinchildren

Migraine Action

www.migraine.org.uk

Migraine trust

www.migrainetrust.org

See next page for symptom diary

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