

CT Children's CLASP Guideline Family Handout

Migraines and Other Headache Disorders

FAMILY HANDOUT: INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS WITH HEADACHES

Common Headache Triggers

1. **Skipping Meals:** Headaches can be triggered by going too long in between meals. Skipping breakfast is common in the adolescent age group. This commonly can trigger headaches later in the day. It is important to eat breakfast because your body has gone all night in the fasting state and prolonging this can trigger headaches. It is recommended that patients with a history of headaches eat 3 meals a day plus snacks.
2. **Dehydration:** It is common for children and adolescents not to drink much fluid during the school day. This relative dehydration can trigger headaches. It is important for patients with a history of headaches to pay attention to their fluid intake throughout the day. Water is best. Electrolyte beverages (Gatorade/powerade) can also be used, however would limit to one a day or when playing sports and sweating as they do have salts and sugar in them. Caffeinated beverages are actually dehydrating (causes you to urinate) so actually do not help with hydration.
3. **Caffeine:** Caffeine can trigger headaches in some patients. Alternatively if you drink caffeine even once a day and then do not drink it or drink less than your usual amount this can trigger a caffeine withdrawal headache. Caffeine should be avoided in patients with headaches.
4. **Lack of Sleep:** Sleep deprivation and chronic sleep deprivation can trigger headaches. It is difficult to improve headache control when there is poor quality sleep present. Some patients have migraines when they sleep too little or more than usual. It is helpful to have a set bedtime and wake up at the same time everyday.
5. **Lack of exercise:** Cardiovascular exercise is helpful in preventing headaches from occurring. Aim for at least 10 minutes a day of exercise and build up to 30 minutes 3x/week.
6. **Frequent use of over the counter pain medications:** The use of over the counter pain medications more than 2 days per week can cause medication overuse (also called rebound) headache. This means your body gets used to a certain amount of pain medication and then the days you do not take it you will get a headache. That headache will also be less responsive to those medications.
7. **Stress:** Stress is a common trigger for headaches. This can be caused by external (things going on around you) or internal (pressure you put on yourself) factors. Reducing stress can reduce headaches.
8. **Anxiety or depression:** Mood concerns can contribute to headaches. If you are concerned about anxiety or depression talk to your doctor about seeing a specialist (psychiatrist/psychologist).

Keeping a headache diary

1. Can allow you to identify headache triggers (for example: certain foods or activities)
2. Can allow you to identify headache patterns (for example: always after school after not having much water for a few hours)
3. Bring this to your headache appointments and show your doctor

The National Headache Foundation has headache diary forms that can be downloaded and printed at www.headaches.org.