



HealthMatters

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Mastering migraine headaches: effective ways of finding relief

Headaches are one of the most common ailments diagnosed and treated by physicians. In the United States, nearly 18% of women and 6% of men experience migraine headaches.

Treatment with medication.

Medication can be used in the treatment of migraine headaches, and is most effective when used in combination with other treatments. There are three different categories of medications for migraine headaches:

- **Symptomatic relief** alleviates the symptoms associated with migraine headache.
- **Abortive therapy** stops the process that causes migraine headache pain.

These medications are most effective if used at the first sign of a migraine.
- **Preventive therapy** prevents migraine headaches by reducing the frequency, duration, and severity of headache attacks.

Over time, daily or almost daily use of both over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription medications can make migraine headaches worse, and may lead to developing chronic headaches.

Rebound headaches may result from taking OTC or prescription pain relievers more than two days a week. This could lead to taking more and more medication, which may aggravate the pain.

The most common drugs responsible are:

- Excedrin®, or its combination aspirin, acetaminophen, and caffeine generic equivalents
- Aleve® or naproxen, its generic, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) equivalent
- Motrin®, Advil® or ibuprofen, its generic NSAID equivalent
- Tylenol® or acetaminophen, its generic equivalent
- Prescription triptans
- Prescription narcotics and opioids
- Prescription barbiturate-containing medications, including Fiorinal® and Fioricet®

Typical migraine symptoms may include:

- Head pain that is moderate to severe in intensity, worsened by physical activity
- Pain on one or both sides of the head
- Throbbing pain or pressure-like pain
- Sensitivity to light, sound, and smells
- Nausea and vomiting
- Dizziness

Additional therapies

In addition to medication, many techniques have been found to be successful in reducing both the duration and intensity of migraine headache pain. Usually, these methods are most effective when used at the onset of a migraine or headache. Be sure to consult with your Everside provider for guidance on which treatments are appropriate for you.

1. Breathing exercises

Tension-related headaches can sometimes be relieved with focused breathing that eases your mind and your muscles. Start by finding a quiet, distraction-free place and sitting comfortably. Next, close your eyes and take deep, rhythmic breaths, slowly inhaling through your nose for 5 seconds and exhaling through your mouth for 5 seconds.

2. Hot/cold application

Hot compress – You can purchase a heat pack at most drugstores, or make your own. Take a small piece of fabric, fill it about two-thirds full with uncooked rice, then tie the open end together. Microwave the rice for one minute and apply to the back of your neck or forehead.

Cold compress – Place ice in a plastic bag covered with a thin cloth to avoid harming your skin. Place the ice pack on your forehead and/or cheeks, wherever the greatest source of pain is. Limit cold pack applications to no more than 10 minutes at a time.

3. Massage

Massage has been proven to relieve different types of headaches including chronic, tension, and migraine headaches. It's effective for many reasons, including:

- Promoting circulation and blood flow to areas that might be lacking blood flow, helping to relieve pain.
- Reducing pain felt in trigger points — tender tissue that can cause pain in other areas of the body when irritated.
- Loosening tight muscles and relaxing tight bands of tissue causing muscle spasms and tension.
- Regulating cortisol levels to lower stress while increasing endorphins to promote relaxation.

Want to Learn More?

Make an appointment with your Everside provider to discuss what you can do to ease migraine pain.

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4. Physical therapy

For headaches that stem from injured structures within the neck, physical therapy can be especially effective. Factors such as stiff neck joints, nerve irritation, and soft tissue tightness can all contribute to painful cervical headaches. By increasing range of motion and strengthening surrounding neck muscles, physical therapy exercises are effective in reducing both the frequency and severity of headaches.

5. Dry needling

Muscles can develop knotted, highly sensitive areas. Also known as trigger points, these tender areas are often the cause of referred pain, or pain that affects another part of the body. To provide relief, thin, solid needles are pushed through the skin directly into the trigger points. Dry needling works by gently stimulating the muscle tissue. No medication is injected. A growing body of research supports the use of dry needling for the treatment of mild to moderate headache pain.

6. Acupuncture

Acupuncture involves applying fine, sharp needles to key areas on the body as a means of stimulating the body's natural pain-relieving compounds. According to the National Institutes of Health, it has been shown to reduce headache frequency and severity.

7. IV hydration

IV hydration therapy utilizes a combination of vitamins, electrolytes, antioxidants, hydrating fluids, and medication to combat nausea and inflammation. This migraine cocktail can be a highly effective option for counteracting migraine symptoms, and typically takes less than an hour to complete.

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