

# HEADACHES

A headache is one of the most common types of pain; in fact, one study found that 14% of American adults reported having a severe headache within the previous three months. There are many kinds of headaches. While some of them are not serious, others can be painful enough to require treatment, and headaches might indicate underlying health problems.

## TYPES OF HEADACHES

The International Headache Society classifies 150 types of primary and secondary headaches.

Among primary headaches, pain is caused only by the headache itself; secondary headaches are caused by another condition (such as a head or neck injury). Some of the most common headaches are:

- **Tension headaches**, brought on by stress, are caused by tensed muscles in the head, neck or jaw.
- **Sinus headaches**, caused when the sinus passages become inflamed.
- **Cluster headaches** behind or around the eyes, which can be triggered by heavy smoking, drinking alcohol, changes in sleep patterns, hormones or medication.

## MIGRAINES

One serious type of headache is the migraine. It brings pulsing pain along with nausea or vomiting, and sensitivity to light and/or sound.

About one-fifth of those who get migraines experience “aura” about 20 minutes to an hour before the pain starts. Aura is a visual disturbance that might appear as flashing lights, dots, wavy lines or blind spots.

Those experiencing severe and frequent migraines can benefit from a conversation with a healthcare professional about prevention and treatment.

## CHECK YOUR SYMPTOMS

Sometimes headaches are only temporary, but headaches also can indicate more significant health trouble. A headache diary can be helpful in recognizing a pattern in what triggers headaches.

The American Headache Society recommends the SNOOP method of identifying red flags in analyzing headaches. A headache might indicate something more serious if these factors are present:

- Systemic symptoms such as fever or weight loss.
- Neurological symptoms such as confusion or lack of alertness.
- Onset: A headache that comes on suddenly.
- Older: A pattern of headaches that begins in those 50 or older.
- Previous headache history: Has there been a change in the frequency or severity of your headaches?

If you are experiencing any of these types of problems with headaches, it's wise to seek medical attention.

## **RESOURCES**

**The UK Headache Center** provides specialized care to patients suffering with headache. The UK Headache Center is the only comprehensive headache clinic in Kentucky that has been accredited by the United Council for Neurologic Subspecialties, and it is one of only 20 centers in the country that provide advanced training in headache medicine to eligible physicians.

[ukhealthcare.uky.edu/kni/home](http://ukhealthcare.uky.edu/kni/home)

859-323-5661

800-333-8874

**American Academy of Family Physicians,**  
[www.familydoctor.org/condition/headaches](http://www.familydoctor.org/condition/headaches)