

MANAGING HEADACHES

Following Concussion/Mild Traumatic Brain Injury

Traumatic Brain Injury Center of Excellence



U.S. Army photo by
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This patient fact sheet focuses on non-drug options to help you manage your headaches.

BASICS:

- Headaches are the most common symptom following a concussion, also known as mild traumatic brain injury
- You may have new headaches, or a worsening of headaches you had before your concussion
- Most people recover quickly from post-traumatic headaches
- Consult with your health care provider to determine the cause of your headache, and to make a plan for treatment

HEADACHE TRIGGERS:

Although each headache is different, identifying common causes (triggers) is important to help you and your provider manage your headaches. Check off any triggers in this list that seem to come before your headache starts:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Too much sleep | <input type="checkbox"/> Loud noise | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical activities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Too little sleep | <input type="checkbox"/> Warm room temperature | <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual activity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Too much caffeine | <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional stress (anxiety) | <input type="checkbox"/> Straining or coughing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Missing meals | <input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol | <input type="checkbox"/> Bending over |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Muscle tension | <input type="checkbox"/> Certain foods: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Weather changes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bright light | <input type="checkbox"/> Medicines: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Menstrual cycle |

NON-DRUG TREATMENTS:

Your health care provider may prescribe medicines to help relieve or prevent headaches, however there are many good non-drug options. If you are taking prescribed medications, continue to take them as directed by your health care provider. Discuss these non-drug treatment options with your health care team.

Issue	What Can I Do?
Trouble sleeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remove TV, radio, smartphone, computers, etc., from the bedroom• Try to relax before bed; only use the bedroom for sleep or sex• Go to bed only when tired or sleepy• If you don't fall asleep in 20 minutes, get up and do something relaxing until you feel sleepy• Keep your bedroom quiet, dark and cool

Issue	What Can I Do?
Trouble sleeping (cont.) Dehydration Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get up the same time every day and avoid naps • Try to spend time outside in the sun every morning • Avoid caffeine/stimulants 6 hours before bed • Exercise daily, but not close to bedtime • Avoid alcohol, tobacco, heavy meals and drinking too much of anything before bed • Avoid dehydration by drinking plenty of water • Avoid skipping meals, eat a balanced diet
Tension Tight muscles Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progressive muscle relaxation - focusing on relaxing one muscle group at a time • Biofeedback - learning to control body functions. This helps you focus on making subtle changes, such as relaxing certain muscles, to relax or to reduce pain (biofeedback usually requires a referral, so you should discuss this with your health care provider).

These therapies may require a referral from your provider:

Recommendations	Description	Type of Provider
Physical therapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stretching and exercises • Ice, heat or other therapeutic modalities • Therapeutic massage of the head and neck areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rehabilitation medical provider
Cognitive behavior therapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ways to evaluate situations and your response; includes relaxation and breathing techniques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health provider
Acupuncture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using needles, heat and pressure according to time-honored Chinese practices to reduce pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acupuncturist

A headache diary can help you remember information to share with your health provider.

Sample:

Date	What makes my headache worse?	What makes my headache better?	What time did my headache start?	How long did my headache last?

RESOURCES:

Ask your health care team about additional treatment options. Visit [Health.mil/TBIEducators](https://www.health.mil/TBIEducators) to find a specialist near you.