



## Tension Headache

JAMA. 2001;285(17):2282 (doi:10.1001/jama.285.17.2282)

Online article and related content  
current as of November 15, 2009.

Supplementary material

Key Words

<http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/285/17/2282/DC1>

Correction

[Contact me if this article is corrected.](#)

Citations

[Contact me when this article is cited.](#)

Topic collections

JAMA Patient Page

[Contact me when new articles are published in these topic areas.](#)

Related Articles published in  
the same issue

Management of Chronic Tension-Type Headache With Tricyclic Antidepressant Medication, Stress Management Therapy, and Their Combination: A Randomized Controlled Trial  
[Kenneth A. Holroyd et al. JAMA. 2001;285\(17\):2208.](#)

Subscribe

<http://jama.com/subscribe>

Email Alerts

<http://jamaarchives.com/alerts>

Permissions

[permissions@ama-assn.org](mailto:permissions@ama-assn.org)

<http://pubs.ama-assn.org/misc/permissions.dtl>

Reprints/E-prints

[reprints@ama-assn.org](mailto:reprints@ama-assn.org)

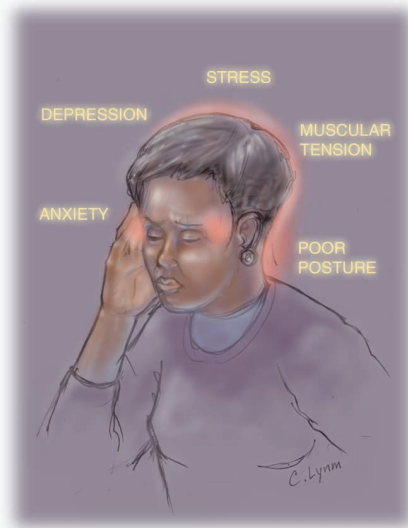
# Tension Headache

An article in the May 2, 2001, issue of JAMA reports the results of a study of the effectiveness of receiving antidepressant medication, stress management, or a combination of both therapies to treat **chronic tension-type headaches**.

## WHAT ARE TENSION-TYPE HEADACHES?

Tension-type headaches are the most common type of headache. These headaches feel like a tight band or pressure at both temples, the forehead, or the back of the head and neck. The intensity of the pain is usually mild to moderate and does not increase with physical activity. When tension-type headaches are **chronic** (recurring frequently for at least 6 months), the discomfort and pain can be disabling.

The exact cause of tension-type headaches is not known, but increased tension of the muscles of the neck, face, and scalp may lead to the pain of tension-type headaches. Factors that may trigger tension-type headaches include stress, anxiety, depression, and muscle tension related to certain physical postures.



## WHEN TO CONTACT YOUR DOCTOR

You should be concerned if you begin having recurring headaches when you have been relatively headache-free, or if the headache is different from those you have previously experienced. Contact your doctor if your headache is more severe, or if it lasts longer than other headaches usually have.

If you experience a headache accompanied by any of the following symptoms, contact your doctor immediately:

- Stiff neck
- Fever
- Convulsions (seizures)
- Confusion, dizziness, weakness, numbness, or paralysis
- Loss of consciousness
- Pain in your eye or ear

You should also contact your doctor when a child has recurring headaches.

Sources: National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, National Headache Foundation, American Academy of Neurology, The AMA Complete Guide to Women's Health, The AMA Home Medical Library, The AMA Family Medical Guide, The AMA Encyclopedia of Medicine

Brian Pace, MA, Writer

Cassio Lynn, MA, Illustrator

Richard M. Glass, MD, Editor

The JAMA Patient Page is a public service of JAMA. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, JAMA and the AMA suggest that you consult your physician. This page may be reproduced noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with patients. Any other reproduction is subject to AMA approval. To purchase bulk reprints, call 718/946-7424.

## KEEPING A HEADACHE DIARY

Keeping a diary of when you experience headaches can help your physician narrow down the possible causes.

- What were you doing before you experienced your headache?
- Were you performing some strenuous physical activity?
- Were you working at your computer for a long period?
- Where were you (indoors, outdoors, in a car)?
- Were you near anything that may be toxic or may have caused you to have an allergic reaction, such as smoke, pets, pollen, dust, or chemicals?
- What were you eating or drinking before the headache started?
- Had you taken any medication or dietary supplements?
- Did you skip a meal?
- Were you feeling tense, upset, or in a bad mood?
- Were you experiencing any other medical problems or symptoms?
- What time of day was it?

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke  
800/352-9424  
[www.ninds.nih.gov](http://www.ninds.nih.gov)
- National Headache Foundation  
[www.headaches.org](http://www.headaches.org)  
800/643-5552

## INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Index on JAMA's Web site at [www.jama.com](http://www.jama.com). A JAMA Patient Page on migraine headaches was published on November 22/29, 2000.

