

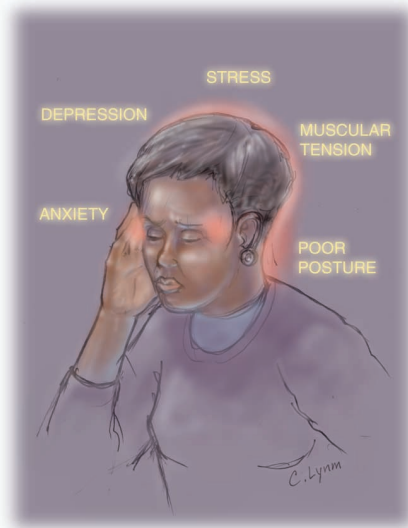
Tension Headache

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

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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
- National Headache Foundation
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. A JAMA Patient Page on migraine headaches was published on November 22/29, 2000.

