

Heal Your Headache Now!

New Woman Magazine April 2005

There are hundreds of different types of headache. We look at five of the most common – and find out how to cure them.

Another average day dawns. You hit the snooze button once too often, miss the train, get to your meeting late, skip lunch to catch up on the 57 emails in your inbox, have a few drinks after work in an attempt to wind down, then grab a hurried snack before crashing out for a few hours' sleep. And you still wonder why your head feels like it's crushed in a vice? Here are the most common reasons for your pulsing pain.

1. Tension headaches

CAUSED BY: Lack of sleep, anxiety and depression, says Sarah Cumbers of the UK's Migraine Trust. 'Stress makes you tighten your neck and forehead muscles, bringing on a horrible headache.'

SYMPTOMS: You may be sensitive to light or sound. Pain-wise, it's a pressing sensation around your head.

TREATMENT: First, try a good night's sleep. If you don't like over-the-counter painkillers (those with codeine are most effective). Meditation and massage will release tension. To get to the source, try acupuncture. **'It's very effective in treating headaches, stress and related conditions,' says Judy James of the Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association.**

2. Rebound headaches

CAUSED BY: Taking too many painkillers. 'if you're always popping pills, your body gets used to them and they'll be less effective,' says Sarah.

SYMPTOMS: They occur on a nearly daily basis and symptoms are like a migraine.

TREATMENT: Going cold turkey will bring on one mother of a headache. If you want to quit those pills (never take more than 15 painkillers a month) ask your GP for help.

3. Sinus headaches

CAUSED BY: Inflamed sinuses due to infection or allergy.

SYMPTOMS: Sleepy eyes, runny nose and a dull ache around your nose, eyes and forehead. You may also feel weak and shaky and have swollen or dark circles under your eyes.

TREATMENT: You'll need antibiotics if your sinuses are infected but a bit of steam can work wonders. Fill a basin with hot water and inhale the steam, or place hot and cold compresses across your sinuses to ease the swelling.

4. Eye strain headaches

CAUSED BY: Hours in front of a computer, too much TV, bad posture and high blood pressure.

SYMPTOMS: Pain in your forehead, with a sore neck, a dull ache behind your eyes and blurred or double vision.

TREATMENT: Take regular breaks, get your eyes checked and make sure your chair, desk and PC are positioned properly.

5. Migraines

CAUSED BY: Lack of food or sleep, stress, hormonal imbalances and food intolerances.

SYMPTOMS: 'A recurring headache with nausea or sensitivity to light and sound,' says Sarah. You'll get a throbbing pain in one side of your head, lasting from four hours to three days.

TREATMENT: There's no definite cure but evidence suggests Botox injections can help by loosening muscle tension in the brain. It's worth watching what you eat, says dietician Sarah Schenker. 'Some foods, especially those containing phenyl ethylamine (cheese, chocolate, wine) can trigger attacks.'