

Headaches Associated with Neck Pain

The following information is for individuals experiencing persistent headaches for 3 months or more



Why do I get headaches?

Possible triggers include:

- Neck sprains/strains
- Muscular tension
- Emotional stress
- Awkward postures (e.g., sitting, sleeping)

Will my headache go away?

- Headaches often resolve within a few minutes, days, or weeks
- Treatment can speed up recovery while reducing pain and improving function

What can I do?

To help speed up your recovery:

- Participate in your care with your healthcare provider
- Continue day-to-day activities even if you experience some pain (within reason)

Potential treatment options to discuss with your healthcare provider

- Neck and shoulder exercises ([click here for examples of exercises](#))^{a,b,c}
- Therapist-guided/directed postural correction of the cervical and thoracic spine in a sitting position^b
- Aerobic exercise^b
- Clinical massage^b
- Spinal manipulation/mobilization^c

Contact your healthcare provider if you experience any of the following

- Worsening headache with fever
- Sudden-onset headache reaching maximum intensity within 5 minutes
- Sudden change in personality or impaired level of consciousness
- Headaches triggered by coughing, sneezing or exercise
- Eye pain, halos around lights, double vision, or vision loss

^aRecommended for episodic tension-type headaches | ^bRecommended for chronic tension-type headaches | ^cRecommended for cervicogenic headaches
Tension-type headache feels like there is a tight band around your head.
Cervicogenic headache is head pain coming from the neck.

Côté P, Yu H, Shearer HM, Randhawa K, et al. Non-pharmacological management of persistent headaches associated with neck pain: A clinical practice guideline from the Ontario Protocol for Traffic Injury Management (OPTIMA) Collaboration. Eur J Pain. 2019. 1-20.