



# Health Tips for Parents

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## Understanding headaches in children

Headaches aren't only for adults. Kids get them, too. In fact, by the age of 18, more than 90 percent of children and adolescents will experience at least one headache.

There are two basic types of headaches: primary and secondary. Primary headaches include tension-type headaches, migraines and new daily persistent headaches (NDPH). Secondary headaches are caused by another condition, such as an infection or injury, and usually go away once the condition is treated.

### Primary headaches

Tension headaches start slowly and cause a feeling of tightness around the head and neck. Among children, they are often caused by stress. Migraines are intense, recurrent headaches. Their exact cause is unknown, but they are hereditary in many cases and can be triggered by stress, food or environmental factors (e.g., lights or sounds).

"With tension headaches and migraines, there are distinct headache-free days between episodes," explains Meeryo C. Choe, MD, UCLA pediatric neurologist. "NDPH, however, starts suddenly and persists daily for three or more months."

Primary headaches are also commonly caused by dehydration, hunger, sleep deprivation, caffeine or hormonal changes.

### Diagnosis and treatment

To determine the type of headache, your doctor will perform a physical and neurological exam. Be prepared to discuss any family history of headaches, your child's lifestyle habits and specific details about their headaches (pattern, location, duration, symptoms, triggers, etc.). In more complex cases, your pediatrician may recommend brain imaging tests.

"Depending on the findings, we may recommend behavioral modifications, such as changes in sleep habits, eating patterns or fluid intake," Dr. Choe says. "Stress-reduction techniques, such as mindfulness or yoga, may also be helpful." For children with mild and infrequent headaches, your doctor may recommend over-the-counter medicines. "If headaches worsen or interfere with regular activities, your child may be referred to a neurologist for more advanced care," Dr. Choe says.

## Pain symptoms

### Tension headaches

- Lasts from 30 minutes to a week
- Dull, squeezing pain on both sides of the head
- Mild to moderate in intensity
- Intensity does not increase with activity
- Tension in the back part of the head or neck

### Migraines

- Lasts from one to 48 hours
- Throbbing pain on one side of the head
- Moderate to severe in intensity
- Intensity increases with activity
- Nausea/vomiting
- Sensitivity to light/sound



## Importance of healthy lifestyle habits

"Maintaining healthy habits — restful sleep, a healthy diet and regular activity — are crucial to a child's overall health and development," Dr. Choe says. "Depending on their age, children should be sleeping eight to 10 hours each night. They should eat small, frequent meals throughout the day and drink plenty of water. It is also important that they participate in regular physical activity."