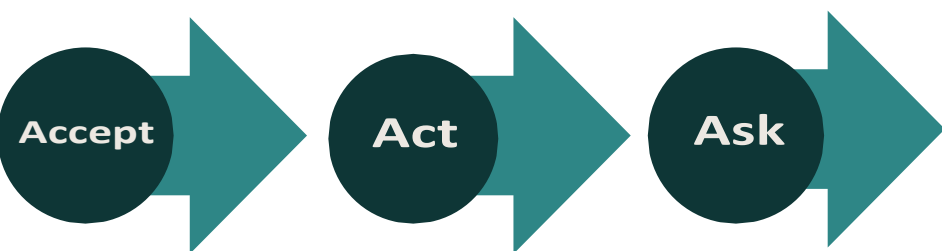


# Heads up - It's time to get to grips with Headache in schools



Information for students 14 years and above



Ted  
Wragg  
TRUST

You are not alone. Over 30% of young people will have problematic headache of which migraine is the most common headache. Headache problems are the second highest cause of health problems in young people.

## What is the likely problem?

Most of headache is one of two types. Sometimes you can have both types.

TENSION-TYPE HEADACHE	MIGRAINE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A dull pain which is usually at the back or around the head.</li><li>• Often associated with stress.</li><li>• No other feelings with it.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A more severe pain anywhere in the head.</li><li>• Can be associated with feeling sick.</li><li>• Can be associated with not liking light, sound, touch or movement.</li><li>• Usually lasts 1-72 hours.</li><li>• May include problems with vision or other disturbance of the nerves called an aura.</li><li>• Often a family history</li></ul>

Figure 1. Most problematic headaches are tension type headache or migraine.

Migraine tends to run in families. But many other things can make migraine or tension headache worse. (See figure 2).

# Why do we get headache?

Migraine is due to an increased sensitivity to things changing whether in the body or in things outside it. The brain becomes overloaded. The person with migraine will want to lie quietly in a dark room. Tension headache is usually a result of stress. Figure 2 shows some things that can make both types of headache worse.

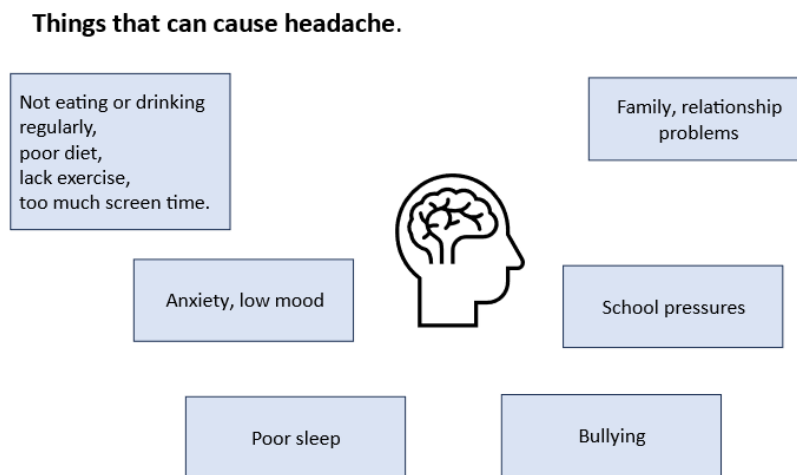


Figure 2. Things that can make headache worse

## What else could it be?

A small number of headaches can arise from other causes other than migraine or tension headache. *Cluster headache* is a rare condition and arguably the most headache known. Pain is always around or in the eye, lasts less than two hours and is associated with being restless. Fortunately, serious causes of headache are rare but some things to look out for are headache getting worse, changes in headache pattern, headache that is associated with other persistent problems of the nerves such as weakness or double vision. If in doubt see your doctor.

## Helping tension-type headache.

Reducing avoidable stress, a healthy lifestyle including diet and exercise and keeping regularly hydrated are the cornerstones of managing tension-type headache. Most tension-type headache will respond to paracetamol or anti-inflammatory medicines providing these are used on less than 15 days of the month. Taken on more days that this can make the headache worse. If things are not settling, your family doctor can offer further help.

## Helping migraine.

### Identifying triggers

Specific things or triggers can sometimes start migraine. You may recognise some of these. Cheese and chocolate are the most common but there may be other triggers that may be individual to you. Drinks such as Coco-Cola, tea and coffee can cause problems.

Important fluctuations that can trigger migraine include chemical or hormone levels in females, lack of proper hydration, food intake not regular, sleep patterns not regular, and stress levels. It is important to keep all these things constant if you can. In particular, ensure regular drinks through the day, regular spaced mealtimes, regular sleep patterns. Don't start the day without breakfast. If you are worried about anything, seek help.

### Treatment with medicine

**i) Treating the migraine attack when it happens** - putting the brakes on the migraine once it has started

The sooner the migraine attack is treated the better it will be.

- *Paracetamol* is a useful pain-killer which alleviates the pain component of migraine.
- *Ibuprofen* reduces the inflammation component of migraine. It can be taken with paracetamol.

Always check with your parents before taking any medication and make sure they read the information leaflet in the box before taking the medication. If these suggestions don't help then your family doctor can suggest other medicines for the migraine attack.

**ii) Preventing the attack – stopping migraine from happening**

When attacks happen a lot, medicine used to stop the migraine from starting can be taken on a regular basis. You will need to see your family doctor for this.

## Migraine may not come alone.

Of particular importance is an association with anxiety or feeling stressed and depression or feeling low. These can make your headache worse. Seek help if this is a problem.

## The importance of a healthy lifestyle.

A healthy lifestyle is an important part of helping your headache. Think about:

### Diet

Don't miss breakfast. Eat a cereal / oat-based breakfast to give a slow release of sugar.

Do not go for long periods without food to avoid low blood sugar levels.

Limit intake of drinks such as tea, coffee, fizzy drinks including cola.

Try to avoid junk food.

### Water

Drink regularly throughout the day to keep hydration levels constant.

### Exercise

Make sure you get plenty of exercise during the day. This can help your headache.

### Sleep.

Maintain a regular time of going to bed and try and get the same amount of sleep each night.

Avoid screen time within an hour of going to bed.

Think about a regular routine before you go to bed.

## So in summary:

1. **Accept You Have a Problem:** Headaches are common and can affect your life, so it's important to take them seriously.
2. **Act to Help Yourself:**
  - Drink water regularly.
  - Don't skip meals, especially breakfast.
  - Keep a regular sleep schedule.
  - Avoid too much screen time, especially before bed.
  - Eat healthy foods and avoid fizzy drinks.

- Exercise regularly.
- Keep a diary to see if certain things trigger your headaches.
- Share your problems with someone you trust.

**3. Ask for Help:**

- Tell your teacher if headaches affect your schoolwork.
- Ask for help if you're feeling stressed or sad.
- Ask your parents for painkillers if the pain is bad, but don't take them too often.
- See a doctor if your headaches don't get better.

**Sources of further information.**

A video with supporting information can be found at  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SoBF4Nu5wUs>

The Migraine Trust has useful advice - [www.migrainetrust.org](http://www.migrainetrust.org)