

# Intermittent HEADACHES in Children

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**H**eadaches are one of the most common complaints during childhood. Although most times headaches are not caused by any serious illness, they can cause great distress to both children and their parents.

## Most Common Types of Headache

**Tension Headache:** This is the most common type headache in childhood and adolescence. These headaches can last from 30 minutes to several days. These headaches will begin gradually, and worsen throughout the day. Your child may complain of pain around the whole head. These headaches are often described as pressing or tightening. Possible triggers include stress, eye strain and poor posture. Ibuprofen and Acetaminophen are usually effective in treating tension headaches.

### *Migraine Headache:*

This type of headache involves the nerves and blood vessels of the brain. The blood vessels first constrict, or get smaller decreasing the amount of oxygen to the brain. This then causes the vessels to expand.

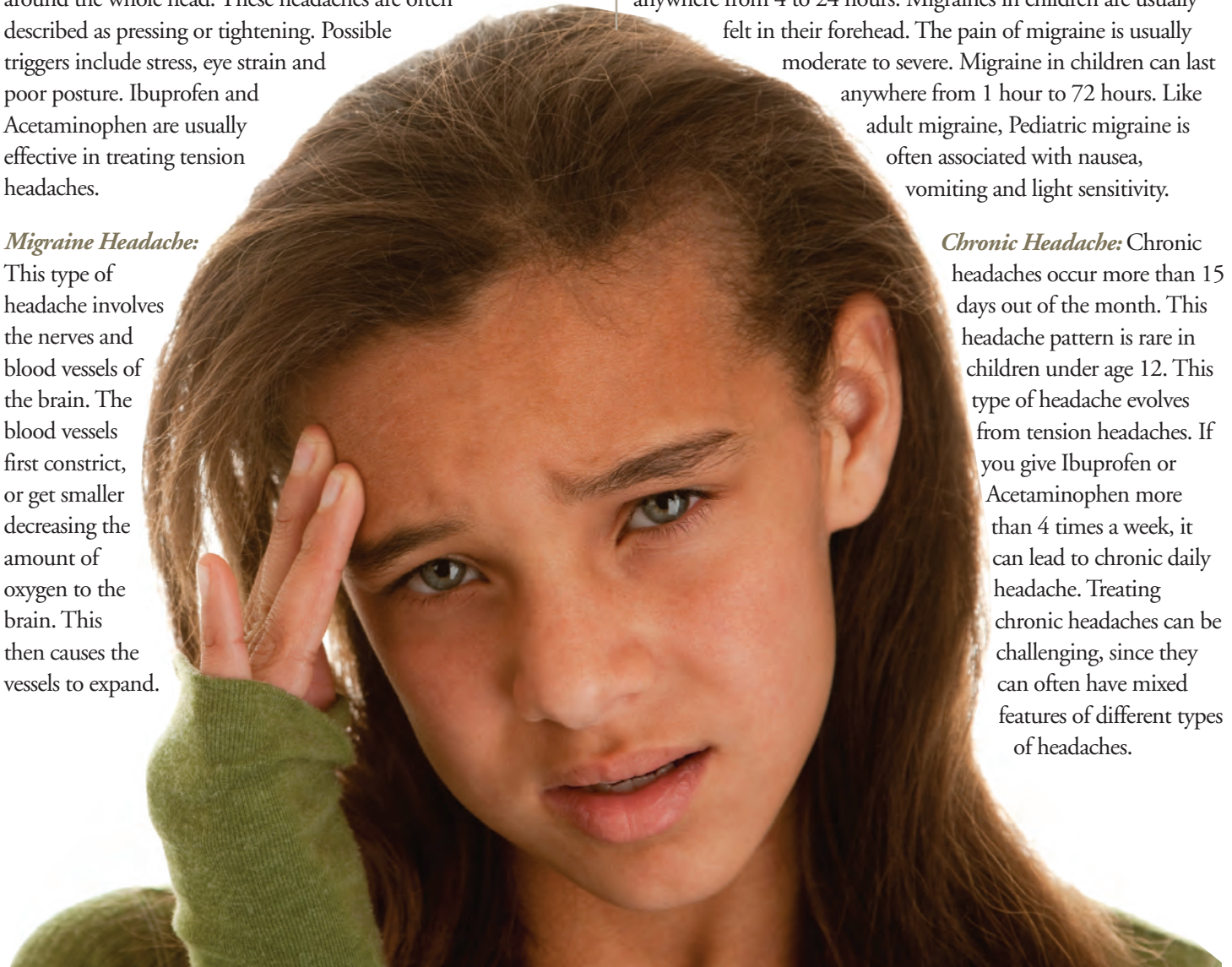
When the blood vessels expand, they become inflamed, and cause throbbing pounding pain.

Migraine often runs in families. In the adult population, migraines are typically one sided severe headaches that can last

anywhere from 4 to 24 hours. Migraines in children are usually felt in their forehead. The pain of migraine is usually moderate to severe. Migraine in children can last anywhere from 1 hour to 72 hours. Like adult migraine, Pediatric migraine is often associated with nausea, vomiting and light sensitivity.

**Any severe headache of sudden onset or progressively worsening non remitting headache requires urgent attention and should be evaluated immediately by your physician.**

**Chronic Headache:** Chronic headaches occur more than 15 days out of the month. This headache pattern is rare in children under age 12. This type of headache evolves from tension headaches. If you give Ibuprofen or Acetaminophen more than 4 times a week, it can lead to chronic daily headache. Treating chronic headaches can be challenging, since they can often have mixed features of different types of headaches.



## Causes of Headache in Children

- Infection
- Poor nutrition and food additives
- Excessive caffeine intake
- Stress
- Lack of Sleep
- Heredity: migraine, cluster headaches

## Headache Treatments

**Ibuprofen:** is one of the most effective medications to treat headaches in children. Ibuprofen is effective even for treating migraine headaches. It should be given as soon as the headache begins, to ensure maximum benefit.

Ibuprofen and Acetaminophen should not be given more than 3 to 4 times a week for headaches. These medications can cause a rebound headache if they are given more frequently.

**Warm or cold compress:** Many children find a warm or cold compress effective in relieving the pain of headache.

**Encourage fluids:** Dehydration is a common cause of headaches. It is particularly important for a child who is prone to headaches to stay well hydrated.

**Rest:** Allowing the child to rest or sleep during the headache in conjunction with Ibuprofen and sleep may also be beneficial.

## Headache Prevention

Headaches can often be well controlled using the following preventative measures:

**Sleep:** Sleep and headache have been shown to be closely linked. A regular sleep schedule is important for every child, especially for those children who are prone to headaches. Parents should establish regular bedtimes, and turn all electronic devices off at night.

**Nutrition:** Is another important way to prevent headaches. Your child should have a good breakfast with a protein source such as yogurt or peanut butter to start the day. Children who are prone to headaches should also eat a balanced lunch and dinner along with healthy snack choices. A multivitamin taken daily can also be helpful. Vitamin B and Magnesium have been shown to be helpful in headache prevention.

**Adequate Fluids:** Encouraging adequate fluids are one of the most important ways you can prevent headaches. Have your child carry a water bottle and drink at least 2 liters of fluid a day. Avoid drinks with too much sugar such as Gatorade. Water is the best choice for hydration.

### **Regular Exercise and Stress Reduction:**

Exercise improves circulation and oxygenation, as well as releasing endorphins to help with a general sense of well being. Methods of stress reduction include yoga, listening to calm quiet music and deep breathing.

### **When to See Your Practitioner**

There are times when your child's headache does not respond to lifestyle and diet changes. If the headache occurs more than 3 times a week, and impacts the normal daily routine of the child, a preventative medication may be indicated.

There are many medications used in headache prevention. There are also herbal supplements such as

Butterbur Extract that have been found to be quite effective for headache prevention. This is the time when you will need the guidance of your Pediatrician. They may decide to refer you to our clinic.

At Elliot Pediatric Neurology, we believe in the "do no harm" approach to headaches. Parents can make the decision to visit our clinic with the guidance of the Primary Care Physician. A referral may be required. We will conduct a thorough history and determine the best options to treat headaches. We have a unique integrative approach to headache treatment. Our clinicians stress the importance of rest, nutrition and sleep to help improve or prevent headache. We also choose treatments based on the child's age, other associated symptoms, and headache pattern. Headaches can be difficult to diagnose and treat in children. However, with the right tools and interventions, a child's headaches can be successfully managed to ensure the best quality of life possible.

Our Clinic is located at:

Elliot Pediatric Neurology

A service of the New Hampshire's Hospital for Children

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Contact the  
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