

HEADACHE AWARENESS AMONG CHILDREN

Headaches aren't just an adult problem. Most schoolchildren will have experienced some type of headache by the time they get to high school, according to the National Headache Foundation (NHF). And the majority of these headaches are caused by good and bad stress – from anticipating a party to a quiz – or sleep problems, or environmental or food triggers. And the NHF says that 20% of U.S. schoolchildren are contending with chronic headaches, 15% of which are tension headaches and 5% that are migraines.

TENSION-TYPE HEADACHES

These headaches come in two forms: episodic (several times/month) and chronic (almost every day).

Episodic tension-type headaches:

- May come on in the middle of the day, building gradually, and last anywhere from 30 minutes to a whole day
- Cause moderate pain
- May feel like a band of pressure around the head

Chronic tension-type headaches:

- Are always there
- Produce a dull throbbing around the front, top and sides of the head
- Also produce a constricting band feeling, aches and soreness
- May awaken kids before they're ready

Tension-type headaches are often caused by:

- Tension or stress
- Depression
- Lack of sufficient sleep

According to the NHF, possible triggers include emotional stressors such as:

- Tension at home
- A new sibling
- Being made fun of by other kids
- Having parents be too strict or demanding
- Having parents be too permissive or inattentive
- No close friends
- Irregular, insufficient sleep
- Self-image issues, such as being overweight
- Learning difficulties
- Going to a new school
- Being competitive in sports or other activities
- The pressure to be an "A" student
- Tests and exams
- Death or separation from a loved one
- Being overloaded with extracurricular activities

Besides medication, counseling, biofeedback and relaxation techniques can help. Other headache relievers include:

- A neck massage
- A nap
- A walk
- A warm bath or shower
- An ice-pack on the "headachy" part of the head

MIGRAINES

Migraines are vascular headaches that in children are characterized by throbbing head pain on one or both sides of the head. About 15% of child migraine sufferers experience an aura (blurred vision, seeing colored or flashing lights, wavy lines, blind spots) before an attack. Regular sufferers experience:

- Nausea
- Decreased appetite
- Sensitivity to light and noise
- Blurred vision
- Changes to temperament and personality
- Dizziness
- Vomiting

These are often the unfortunate consequence of genetics. If a child has a family history of migraines and gets motion or car sick, he may likely develop migraines. Other triggers may include:

- Good or bad stress
- Skipping meals
- Caffeine
- Certain foods or additives (MSG, cheeses, lunch meats, sausages/hot dogs with nitrates, yogurt, pizza and chocolate)
- Being off a sleep or exercise routine
- Ovulation and menstruation

Some kids may not experience the headache part of a migraine but still have the abdominal pain. These abdominal migraines may present as the flu or having eaten something bad. Plus, cyclical vomiting – with recurring symptoms that can begin at an early age – may evolve into more typical migraine headaches as the child ages.

Besides medication, biofeedback and relaxation techniques can help migraine sufferers.

According to the National Headache Foundation, "If... a child who has only had an occasional headache (once or twice a month) starts experiencing them more frequently (two, three or four times a week), then these should be considered chronic and medical attention should be sought as soon as possible."

