Nearly all of us have suffered from a headache at some point. However, the headache you experience may not be the same as someone else’s. That’s because there are four different types, each having its own pattern of pain and cause. So once you know what type of headache you have, the better you’ll be able to deal with it.

**The four major types of headaches:**

**Tension headache**
- What does it feel like? Tension headache is usually described as a tight band or ‘pulling’ feeling around your head. The pain generally stays the same and does not throb.
- What causes them? It might surprise you to learn that the source of pain in tension headache is tender muscles in the head and neck. When you are stressed or tired, the muscles in your head and neck become sore and tender. When these muscles become tense, the pain travels up to your head and you feel it as a headache.
- What triggers them? Stress, poor posture, bright lights and loud noises often trigger tension headaches.

**Migraine headaches**
- What does it feel like? Migraine pain feels like a throbbing or pulsing pain on one side of your head. You may also experience nausea and sensitivity to light, and even get visual problems such as flashing lights or zigzag lines.
- What causes them? It’s not fully understood what causes a migraine, but it’s thought to be associated with increased blood flow to the head.
- What triggers them? Migraines can be brought on by bright lights, certain foods and hormone changes.

**Cluster headaches**
- What does it feel like? Cluster headaches get their name because the attacks come in groups and often with little warning. You might experience sudden or severe pain behind your eye and sometimes on one side of your head.
- What causes them? It’s not known what causes cluster headaches, but it’s thought to involve the hypothalamus, the brain’s ‘biological clock’.
- What triggers them? There are no associated triggers for cluster headaches, although alcohol is thought to set them off.

**Sinus headache**
- What does it feel like? Sinus headaches feel like a dull, throbbing pain in the front of your head and face. You may feel pressure or fullness around your eyes, cheeks and forehead. It often gets worse if you move or bend forward.
- What causes them? Sinus headaches are caused by congestion and inflammation in your sinuses, the air-filled cavities around your nose, eyes, and cheeks.
- What triggers them? Allergies, hay fever or a cold can bring on a sinus headache.
The most common headache doesn’t start in your head

Most of us know what a headache feels like. In fact, 8 out of 10 people have headaches from time to time. You might blame your headache on long days in front of a computer, skipping meals and not getting enough sleep.

But that doesn’t really explain the source of the pain – does it come from your head or is there something else going on?

Pinpointing the source of pain

When you have a headache, you might be tempted to think that the pain comes from your forehead or has something to do with your brain. However, it might surprise you to know that the source of the pain could be the muscles in your neck and head. But how can a neck muscle cause your head to hurt?

It’s all because of a type of pain called referred pain. Referred pain happens when your brain confuses pain signals from one part of the body and thinks that they are coming from another part of the body.

Because everything in the body is connected, the brain has difficulty pinpointing exactly where the pain is coming from. So when the muscles in your neck and head are sore, you feel it as a headache. And with more than 20 different neck and head muscles, that’s a lot of potential for a headache!

The source of common headache pain

The most common type of headache feels like a band of pain wrapped around your forehead. However, we know that this pain is most likely due to a muscle somewhere in your neck or another part of the head.

So what is it about those head and neck muscles that’s causing your head to ache? It may be because the muscles in your neck are becoming tight and strained. When this happens, sore knots develop in the muscles. These tender muscles knots send pain signals to the brain. It’s the pain signals from these muscle knots that you feel as a tight band of pressure around your head.

When should I be concerned about my headache?

Most headaches are not a sign of a more serious illness. However, you should see your doctor if:

• Your headache is the result of a head injury
• You develop problems with your vision such as blurriness
• Headache symptoms become severe
• Headache is accompanied by other symptoms such as fever or vomiting.

Ways you can manage headache pain

Avoid headache triggers

Different things trigger headaches in different people. Work out what brings on your headaches and keep a headache diary. When you feel one coming on, make a note of what you were doing or eating before you felt the pain. Once you know your triggers, it’s much easier to take steps to avoid them.

Rest and relax

People commonly identify stress as a headache trigger. Relaxation techniques such as meditation may help to reduce stress. Maintaining a good work-life balance and getting enough sleep can also help.

Exercise and eat regularly

Lack of exercise and skipping meals may also trigger headaches. A short walk during your lunch break or going to the gym can also help reduce the number of tension headaches you get.

Pain-relieving medication

Pain relievers such as ibuprofen, the active ingredient in Nurofen target the source of the pain and help provide relief from pain. For fast pain relief, Nurofen Zavance is absorbed up to twice as fast as standard Nurofen.


Always read the label. Use only as directed. Incorrect use can be harmful. If symptoms persist, see your healthcare professional.