

Further information can be obtained from:

NHS 111	Dial 111
Or contact your GP	
Bluebell Ward, Lister Hospital, Stevenage	01438 284008
Children's A&E, Lister	01438 284333
QEII Urgent Care Centre, Welwyn Garden City	01707 247549
Lister Community Children's Nurses	01438 284012
QEII Community Children's Nurses	01438 288370
Patient Advice and Liaison Service	01438 285811

Headaches in Children and Young People

Child Health Patient Information Leaflet



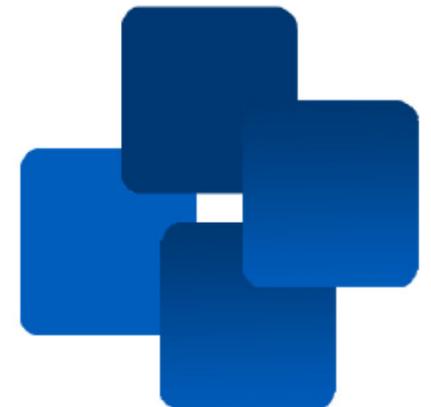
References - The information in this leaflet has been adapted from:

- British Paediatric Neurology Association (BPNA)
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Headsmart.org.uk
- NHS Choices
- Migrainetrust.org
- American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) - www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Where-We-Stand-TV-Viewing-Time.aspx

Date of publication: March 2018
 Author: Dr Jane Hoddes
 Reference: CH Version: 01
 Review Date: March 2021
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www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk

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How common are headaches?

Headaches are a very common problem. Around two thirds of the childhood population have one or more headaches a year. Headaches can occur at any age, but are more common in adolescents. A quarter of adolescents suffer weekly headaches and 1% have daily headaches.

What can be done to help?

There are many different types of headache. Some of these require medication, but identifying and managing the triggers and simple lifestyle measures can help headache sufferers in many cases.

Medication

Simple over the counter painkillers, such as paracetamol and ibuprofen, can be of benefit if taken early on in the course of the headaches. However, if they are taken very frequently (more than fifteen days a month for three months) this can lead to worsening of headaches, a condition known as medication overuse headache. The management for this is to stop all painkillers. This may lead to worsening of headaches for up to two weeks, after which symptoms should improve.

Addressing stress and psychological problems

Headaches are commonly triggered by psychological stress. In children and young people this can be caused by home factors, i.e. parental separation; birth of a new sibling; school and social factors, such as school transition, friendship or self image problems. High achievers often put a lot of pressure on themselves which can lead to stress related headaches. Low achievers may also feel stressed in the school environment. Addressing these issues can make a big difference to headache sufferers. Relaxation and mindfulness can be useful techniques.

Regular food and drink

It is important to eat regular meals and have a good fluid intake throughout the day. Skipping meals and dehydration due to inadequate drinking can both cause headaches. Some children and young people suffer from headaches during sport. Drinking water and taking glucose tablets if necessary before sports can help.

Sleep

Lack of sleep or irregular sleep patterns can lead to headaches. Having a regular bedtime and bedtime routine, and minimising screen time before bed can improve the situation.

Screen time

Many children and young people spend a large proportion of their time viewing screens, e.g. television, computers, games consoles, smartphones. Consistent limits on these activities should be put in place by parents. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has guidelines for this (please see the back of this leaflet for website).

Physical activity

In modern lifestyles, many children have little exercise. A healthy lifestyle should include exercise, such as visits to the park or playing football. Having daily exercise helps reduce stress and headaches.

Does my child need a brain scan?

MRI brain scans are not routinely performed. Although there is often anxiety about brain tumours, these are associated with only 0.3% of childhood headaches. If, in addition to their headaches, your child has persistent/recurrent vomiting; problems with balance/co-ordination or walking; abnormal eye movements, blurred or double vision; behavioural changes; fits or seizures (without fever); abnormal neck position or delayed/arrested puberty, then you should seek advice from your GP.