



**nurse
anna**

Headaches after ABI

Here, I can tell you more about headaches if you would like to know. Don't forget, not everyone has the same types of headaches so just because they are mentioned here doesn't mean to say you will get them. This section will tell you about:

- **The different types of headaches**
- **Headaches after an ABI.**
- **Medication headaches**
- **Does a headache mean something is seriously wrong with me?**
- **What can be done about headaches?**

Types of headache

There are many different types of headache so we will just focus on the main ones:

- Tension headaches
- Migraine headaches.

Other types, which are less common:

- Traction and Inflammatory headaches

Occasionally, people who have been prescribed medication by the doctor may get:

- Medication headaches.

Tension Headaches

This is caused by the muscles in your head and neck being uptight and stressed. Most people get this sort of headache from time to time, especially adults and teenagers. This is because there are lots of day to day stresses that can make you feel very tense.

Tension headaches tend to come and go in most people every once in a while. Sometimes people do have them long-term; these are called 'chronic tension headaches'.

Tension headaches can be caused by;

- **Stress:** Teenagers are under a lot of pressure at school at the best of times. If you or your friend are starting back at school after an ABI, this stress can be much greater.





**nurse
anna**

- **Fatigue:** Feeling tired and sleepy for a few days can start to make you feel moody and grumpy. This can start to make you feel really tense and you could get a headache.
- **Poor posture:** Slouching in a chair or not stretching every so often can make your muscles really tense. This can have an effect on how you feel and, sure enough, your muscles will start to get tense too! You can then get a headache from muscle tension.
- **Eye strain:** Your eyes are busy all the time and send a lot of messages to the occipital lobe in the brain to figure out what it is you are looking at. Sometimes we can develop poor eyesight and not realise it. Sight deterioration is mostly painless and so we often have no idea if our eyes aren't working properly. Our eyes will always try and compensate too by making the lens in our eye change size and shape to make objects look bigger and clearer. This works well most of the time although over time we can develop 'eye strain'. Eye strain can then cause headaches. It is a problem that can be fixed though. A special eye doctor called an optician will be able to see if you need glasses or not. Many people wear glasses; they come in all colours and shapes and can make you look really intelligent. Hopefully they will stop the headaches too.
- **Smoking and alcohol:** Both of these substances are 'toxins' This means they can harm the body and they can cause nasty headaches too! Smoking is bad for the whole body but causes the blood vessels in the brain to narrow and so the brain can't get enough oxygen. Alcohol causes the blood vessels in the brain to get bigger which can give you a 'throbbing head'. Both can cause some very nasty headaches! There are lots of other complications caused by smoking and drinking large amounts of alcohol.
- **Periods in teenage girls and women:** For girls on their period, the muscles in their abdomen can tense up and be very painful. Hormones can also make you feel moody and tearful and this can cause headaches too.

Migraine Headaches

Migraine headaches do not affect so many people as tension headaches but they are very painful and can make you feel very ill. They are caused by the blood vessels in the brain narrowing, known as 'vasoconstriction'. The headache is caused when the blood tries to get up to the brain at very high pressure. This can cause a nasty throbbing pain and can make you feel sick and sensitive to light and noise.





**nurse
anna**

Migraines tend to affect more women than men. Some of the reasons you might get migraines are:

- The same things that cause tension headaches can sometimes 'trigger' a migraine. This means that a tension headache gets much worse and becomes a migraine.
- Family history: If several members of your family have had migraines this becomes part of your 'family history'. This means you have an increased chance of getting migraines because the rest of your family get them too.
- Alcohol and smoking: Sorry to nag but these are really bad for your brain. Smoking can cause a migraine and alcohol can 'trigger' a migraine.
- Fatigue: The same as for tension headaches.
- Periods in teenage girls and women – this is the same as for tension headaches. Sometimes taking the contraceptive pill can also 'trigger' migraines.
- Food triggers – sometimes different food can trigger migraines in different people. If you get migraines regularly you can usually tell what foods trigger your migraine. This can be the caffeine in tea, coffee, chocolate and fizzy drinks, or maybe even cheese and milk products. Foods that are high in salt such as any 'junk food' will almost certainly trigger a headache and you should also look out for 'E numbers' and preservatives in some foods as these don't help either!

Traction headaches

Very few people get these. If you have a brain tumour or a lump that is in the brain it can push the healthy brain tissue to the side. 'Traction' means pulling, in this case it means how the tumour pushes and pulls the brain around inside the skull.

Inflammation of the brain can cause an 'inflammatory headache' which is also a type of traction headache, because parts of the brain can swell and push and pull on other parts.

The symptoms of a traction headache are the same as a tension headache or migraine although they tend to be much more serious. They can also include the following symptoms:

- Blurred vision
- Feeling of wanting to be sick (called nausea), particularly in the morning.
- Dizziness





**nurse
anna**

- Sensitivity to bright lights and sound
- Sleepiness.

Headaches after an ABI

If you or your friend has had a nasty ABI, it is quite common that they may have headaches for some time after. These can come and go although sometimes they may have a 'dull headache' a lot of the time. You might hear doctors and nurses referring to chronic headaches.

When the brain was hurt, there would have been a lot of pulling and pushing about inside the skull (just like a very bad traction headache). The brain can feel wounded, so it needs time to start to feel better.

It is likely that the doctors will prescribe painkillers to help you or your friend with headaches. This should help and you should start to feel better soon. Be patient though, headaches can be challenging to beat! There is lots more you can do to beat headaches in the next section about stress.

Sometimes the doctor may prescribe different medications to help the brain, such as, antiepileptic medicine for example. Sometimes these can cause headaches; there is more about that down below.

Medication headaches

Medications are given to act on a specific problem in the body although other parts of the body will be affected by the medicine too.

These are known as 'unwanted side effects'. Usually they aren't serious and can just be a bit of a problem. Sometimes a patient can have a really bad 'adverse reaction' to medicine which means they should stop using it.

If you think that the medication your doctor has prescribed you is giving you a headache, please let them know. They will usually be able to change to your medicine to one that doesn't give you a headache. Medication affects people in different ways so doctors don't always know who will get a certain reaction to the medicine.

Always make sure you follow the instructions on the bottle and take the recommended dose. If you have a bad headache it can be tempting to take more pills than you should; this can be very dangerous so please





**nurse
anna**

tell your doctor, nurse or pharmacist you are still in pain and they can give you some different painkillers to take as well.

If you are on the contraceptive pill and keep getting headaches, talk to your doctor. They may be able recommend a different pill.

Does a headache mean something is seriously wrong with me?

Everyone gets a headache from time to time and it is usually nothing serious. If you have headache, think about why you have one and you can usually figure it out. Maybe you are stressed, feel tense or have had too much tea and coffee!

Listen to your body and if you have a headache think about how you feel.

Of course, every once in a while a headache will be because there is something seriously wrong. Thankfully this doesn't happen to many people. If there is something seriously wrong, it would be unusual not to have any other signs and symptoms. For example, if you have meningitis you would have a bad headache, feel sick, maybe have a rash and may lose consciousness.

If you have a headache, don't panic. Stay calm, tell a friend and see how you feel later. If you get lots of recurring headaches, go and see your doctor in case it is something serious.

What can be done about headaches?

There are lots of things you can do to prevent yourself from getting a headache. These include:

- **Talk to people:** Please don't stress or suffer from headaches without telling someone. Talking to people (called talking therapy) can help you so much and the help is out there.
- **Relaxation:** Remember a lot of headaches are caused by tension. Learn to chill out and you can learn how to stop getting headaches too! There will be more about relaxation in our section on stress.
- **Gentle exercise:** Exercise is great for headaches because it releases lots of your body's natural painkillers called endorphines. It also helps you muscles relax which stops you feeling 'uptight', stressed, and getting tension headaches.
- **Bedtime routine.** Remember a lot of people get headaches because they feel tired. Try and get into a routine before going to bed.





**nurse
anna**

Sometimes reading a good book (or have someone read it to you), taking a warm bath or shower, and having a cup of warm milk can help make you feel sleepy. Don't play computer games before bed or watch anything on the television that is complicated or gets you excited! This can stop you from sleeping! Also, try going to bed at a set time, say 9.30 pm. This will help your body establish some 'routine' and may help you to feel sleepy when it is time to go to bed!

- **Get your eyes checked:** If you have headaches and eye strain, go and see your optician. You might have to wear but and the headache problem could be fixed.
- **Consider your medicine:** If you are getting recurring headaches and taking medication, including the contraceptive pill, talk to your GP. You may be able to change onto a pill where you don't get headaches.
- **Review your diet:** Maybe you are consuming too many 'junk foods' and not eating enough fruit and vegetables. Remember, you need to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. That's not hard really. A glass of orange juice counts as one portion! Also, ease off on the caffeine!
- **Alcohol:** Use in moderation and don't get too drunk!
- **Smoking:** Avoid this altogether. You'll feel much better for it.

If you have tried all of these tips and still getting the headaches, go and see your GP. They will look into the problem for you.

