

CHRONIC DAILY HEADACHES

Chronic daily headaches are a kind of tension headache, which is the most common type of headache. In fact, 68% of men and 88% of women report that they have had episodes of tension-type headaches.

The pain caused by a chronic daily headache is usually dull and aching. Some people say it's like the pressure you feel when wearing a tight headband. Most people have these headaches when they wake up in the morning, and they last anywhere from a few hours to all day. They occur every day or nearly every day and are often brought on by stress. Sometimes these headaches develop into another kind of headache called rebound headache.

Causes

Many patients who have headaches every day try to stop them at the first hint of pain. This means they may overuse painkillers or analgesics. This kind of overuse may cause rebound headaches.

Although it doesn't seem possible, taking more and more of these painkillers can make a headache worse or even trigger a new one. Rebound headaches are triggered this way: As the level of medication drops in a person's blood some hours after taking it, a headache either gets worse or starts over again. The headache sufferer then takes more pills. Soon he or she is taking more pills over a shorter length of time. This may stop the headaches for a while, but eventually the medication stops working. At this point, the headaches rebound sooner until they finally occur every day and last for nearly the whole day. Many people end up taking dozens of pills a day, not realizing that they are actually making the headache worse instead of better.

Medications for Headache Relief

Many pain relieving drugs can cause rebound headaches. This includes both those your clinician prescribes and those you can buy without a prescription. Caffeine, found in tea, coffee, some soft drinks, and some pain-relief pills, can also be a cause. So can drugs that contain aspirin and acetaminophen. And more powerful painkillers that your clinician prescribes may contain barbiturates or narcotics that can cause headaches if not used correctly.

Treatment

If you are having rebound headaches, the medications that once stopped your headaches won't work any longer. You must first stop taking the analgesics you were taking every day. However, you must consult your clinician before doing this. Stopping some drugs suddenly may cause other problems. Your clinician will decide whether you should withdraw all at once or gradually from the drug you are using, taking fewer and fewer at a time. You may have to go to the hospital before withdrawing from some drugs, like narcotics.

When you are withdrawing from analgesics, you may have frequent headaches, feel nauseous, vomit, and not sleep well, but after 3 to 5 days these symptoms usually disappear or get better. Most people feel better after 2 weeks.

Preventive Medications

Once you have withdrawn from daily analgesics, preventive medications will work again. Your clinician will most likely prescribe something for you or suggest an over-the-counter medication that you can use. He or she will also probably advise you to stop smoking if you do and to avoid caffeine. Keeping a strict daily schedule for getting out of bed, exercising, eating, and sleeping may also help. In addition, you might ask your clinician about how to learn to relax. He or she may suggest a therapist who can teach you how to contract and relax different muscles and introduce you to some special relaxation tapes that you can listen to.

Please Read

If you develop any new, prolonged, or more severe symptoms of your illness, call the advice nurse at 863-4463 or consult your personal clinician. If University Health Services is closed, go to Mount Nittany Medical Center Emergency Department or call 911 for an ambulance.

Test Results and Advice Nurse

Please call the nurse for test results and advice: 863-4463

Appointments

Appointments can be made in person or by phone. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please call and cancel. Otherwise you will be charged for the visit.

To schedule or cancel appointments, call: 863-0774

For more information about health care issues, visit the UHS Web site at www.sa.psu.edu/uhs

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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