Understanding Headaches in Children

Tension vs. Migraine

Headaches in children and teens are common—and stressful for families. The good news: Most are treatable with some awareness and planning. The most common types are tension headaches and migraines. Here's how to tell them apart and what you can do to help your child feel better.

Tension Headaches

What They Feel Like:
- Dull, pressing pain (like a tight band).
- Usually on both sides of the head.
- No nausea or major sensitivity to light/sound.

Typical Triggers:
- Stress or anxiety.
- Long screen time or poor posture.
- Skipping meals or dehydration.
- Not getting enough sleep.

Migraines

What They Feel Like:
- Throbbing or pulsing pain, often one-sided.
- Often includes nausea, vomiting, or light/sound sensitivity
- Some kids have visual symptoms (aura) before the pain starts.

Typical Triggers:
- Certain foods (chocolate, cheese, processed meats).
- Sleep changes or skipped meals.
- Stress or emotional overload.
- Hormonal shifts (especially in teens).

What Helps: Treatment & Prevention Strategies

Whether it's tension or migraines, the following strategies can help reduce the frequency and intensity of headaches:

Lifestyle Tips:
- Encourage consistent sleep, hydration, and balanced meals.
- Limit screen time and encourage movement/stretching breaks.
- Teach and practice stress management (breathing, journaling, yoga)
- Keep a headache diary to track patterns and possible triggers.
- Prioritize downtime—rest is part of healing.

Medical Support:
- Use over-the-counter pain relief (acetaminophen or ibuprofen) early in the headache if needed—always check with your provider.
- For frequent migraines, your doctor might suggest prescription meds or a preventive treatment plan.
- If headaches are intense or disruptive, book a visit to explore causes and options.

When to Call Your Doctor

Contact your provider if:
- Headaches are becoming more frequent or severe.
- Pain is waking your child from sleep.
- There are concerning signs (vision changes, confusion, fever).
- Your child is missing school or avoiding normal activities.
- You're relying on medications more than twice a week.

Support Starts with Understanding

- Listen and validate your child's experience.
- Help them build healthy routines that support brain and body.
- Remind them (and yourself): Having headaches doesn't mean they're not strong or capable.

KIDS Care Clinic

www.thekidscareclinic.com | www.dearmommy.ca

DEAR MOMMY