

There are many types of headaches. This handout will focus on several types of headaches that are commonly associated with mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI) and concussion.

- **Tension Headache:**

- Pain description: dull, pressure, tightness that can feel a tight band around the head
- Causes: muscle tension, stress, or other
- Other symptoms: fatigue, irritability, poor sleep, trouble concentrating
- Treatment may include medications relaxation techniques, biofeedback, massage, stress management, and physical therapy

- **Migraine Headache**

- Pain description: moderate to severe throbbing that may be worse on one side of the head
- Causes: genetics, weather changes, hot weather, lack of sleep, hormones, stress, certain foods, hunger, dehydration, strong odors, strenuous exercise, bright light
- Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, light, noise and smell sensitivity, pain with physical activity, dizziness
- Temporary changes in vision and/or other sensations are called an "aura" and may include:
 - Seeing flashes of light, zig-zagging patterns, or blind spots
 - Numbness, tingling, or weakness
 - Speech problems
- Treatment and prevention may include:
 - Prescribed or over-the-counter medications, resting, limiting light and noise during migraine, and using an ice pack
 - Daily Prevention: medications as prescribed, avoiding migraine triggers
 - Other treatment strategies: relaxation exercises, following a sleep schedule, keeping a headache diary, acupuncture, biofeedback, massage, exercising as tolerated

- **Cluster Headache:**

- Pain description: sharp, boring, severe and rapid; "hot poker in the eye"
- Cause: uncertain; may run in families, may be caused by certain medications used to treat heart disease; may be triggered by changes in sleep
- Other symptoms may include nasal congestion, tearing in eye, feelings of agitation or restlessness, redness of eye
- Treatment and daily prevention may include:
 - Treatment: prescription medications or medications that contain caffeine
 - Daily Prevention: prescribed medications that reduce the frequency of headaches

- **Cervicogenic Headache**

- Pain description: dull, moderate to severe pain that may start in the neck and radiate to the head and face
- Cause: irritated muscles, discs, tendons and joints in the upper neck refer pain to the head
- Other symptoms: may have decreased range of motion



- Treatment may include prescription or over the counter pain medications or muscle relaxers, topical ointments, massage, physical therapy
- **Rebound Headache**
 - It is common to experience headaches after a mTBI or concussion. Many people take over-the-counter pain relievers, such as aspirin, acetaminophen (Tylenol), and combination medications (Excedrin) to manage their headaches.
 - Overuse of these medications commonly causes rebound headaches, making headache symptoms worse. A rebound headache occurs when the effects from the overused over-the-counter pain medications wear off.
 - The pain and frequency of rebound headaches can increase over time.
 - Speak with your doctor about what medication is right for you. Your doctor can recommend medication options and strategies for headaches during your recovery.
- **Seek urgent medical care if the headache:**
 - Feels like the "worst headache of your life"
 - Feels different than your usual headaches
 - Feels like an abrupt, sudden headache
 - Starts suddenly or is aggravated by exertion, coughing, bending over or sexual activity
 - Presents with persistent nausea and vomiting
 - Presents with fever or stiff neck
 - Presents with seizures
 - Is a result of a new head trauma or a fall
 - Presents with changes in vision, speech or behavior
 - Presents with weakness or change in sensation
 - Does NOT respond to treatment and is getting worse
 - Feels like you need to take more than the recommended dose of over-the-counter medications for pain
 - Is disabling and interfering with work and quality of life

You can read more information about Headaches after brain injury provided by Traumatic Brain Injury Model Systems at: <http://www.msktc.org/tbi/factsheets/Headaches-After-Traumatic-Brain-Injury>

Additional Comments:

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