



## BACK FACTS: Headaches

Tension type headaches (TTH) are one of the most common forms of headaches yet they are not well understood. Most people describe having a band of pressure around their head that can last from 30 minutes to a week. TTH can be related to muscles tightening in the back of the neck and scalp. One of the best ways to combat tension headaches is through lifestyle changes. Here are some helpful tips.



**Exercise regularly.** This can help reduce the frequency and intensity of headaches. Exercise relieves stress, relaxes your muscles and increases the levels of beta-endorphins, which are your body's natural stress relievers. So don't just sit there, go for a walk, bike ride or run.

**Healthy lifestyle.** Behaviours that promote general good health may help prevent headaches. This includes following regular eating and sleeping schedules and avoiding excess caffeine and alcohol.

**Stress management.** Stress is a commonly reported trigger for tension type headaches. Reduce stress in your life by organizing your day ahead of time. Try relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, yoga and meditation. Take time away from your busy life to do the things you love to do. Consider seeing a counsellor to develop new coping skills. They are also trained to help you identify events that trigger headaches and work towards a resolution.

**Muscle relaxation.** Muscle tension is associated with tension headache. Applying heat or ice to sore muscles in the shoulders and the back of the neck may ease the tension. Massage is another way to relieve muscle tension. Gently massage the muscles of your head, neck and shoulders with your fingertips. Or have someone else do the massage for you. A warm bath can also do wonders for those tight, achy and stiff muscles.

**Perfecting your posture.** Good posture can help keep your muscles from tensing up and reduces strain on your body. A jutting head combined with slumped shoulders can bring early fatigue/tension to your neck and upper back. When standing, your head, shoulders, hips and ankles should line-up, one comfortably above the other. Your knees should be slightly bent and your feet should be shoulder-width apart or more.

**Telephone.** Use your hand to support the telephone against your ear and alternate sides regularly. Do not cradle the phone between your ear and your shoulder. If you are on the phone a lot, consider using a headset or speaker to reduce strain on your neck and arms.

**Headache diary.** Record when your headaches occur and what you were doing before they started. Try to recognise the factors that cause or aggravate your headaches. Be sure to tell your health care provider if you've noticed any changes in your usual headaches such as frequency, duration or intensity, or if your headaches begin to worry you.

### **Canada's chiropractors – here to help**

Chiropractors can help to identify factors such as your posture or lifestyle habits which could be contributing to your headaches. Should you suffer from tension type headaches, a chiropractor can also provide treatment for your pain.

**Fact:** 80 per cent of Canadians will suffer from back pain in their lifetime. If required, a chiropractor can treat your pain through a variety of methods. These can include: spinal and joint adjustments, modalities such as ultrasound or TENS, soft tissue therapy and therapeutic exercises.

For more information or to locate a chiropractor near you, please visit the Canadian Chiropractic Association website [www.chiropracticcanada.ca](http://www.chiropracticcanada.ca).

**For a throbbing head: take a break to soothe the ache.**

**The CANADIAN CHIROPRACTIC ASSOCIATION**

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