



Headaches in children

Children often get headaches. Usually, there's no reason to worry. Headaches like migraines happen on their own. They can also come from tension, tiredness, or stress.



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

A headache can be a symptom of something else:

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Allergies
- Flu and other infections
- Sinus problems
- Earache
- Hunger
- Teeth problems
- Depression

Very bad headaches may be part of a bigger problem. Here are some examples:

- Head injury
- Meningitis or encephalitis. (These cause the brain to swell.)

Sometimes parents get scared when their child gets a headache. They are afraid their child has a brain tumor. But headaches hardly ever mean a brain tumor.

CAUSES

Usually, a child's headache is caused by tight muscles in the neck and head. Tension or stress makes the muscles tight. Also, some medicines like antihistamines and decongestants can cause headaches. Skipping a meal can cause a headache in many children.



TRIAGE QUESTIONS



Did your child hurt his or her head badly in a fall or accident? Is your child throwing up, having dry heaves, or holding his or her head in pain?

NO **YES** ➔ **GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE**



Does your child have any of these problems?

- Stiff neck and fever, or can't bend the head down
- Feels confused
- Blurry vision or one pupil is bigger than the other
- Trouble talking
- Hard to wake up
- Doesn't walk straight
- Purple spotted rash

NO **YES** ➔ **GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE**



Does your child have these signs of an infection?

- Fever
- Pus in the throat
- Yellow-green mucus that drains from the nose, throat, or ears. A bad smell from the nose, throat, or ears.

NO **YES** ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**



Are your child's headaches on one side of the head? Does your child get an upset stomach or throw up with the headache? Or does your child have blurry or strange vision before the headache starts?

NO **YES** ➔ **CALL DOCTOR**



Does your child get a lot of headaches? Or do your child's headaches last for more than 3 days?

NO **YES** ➔ **CALL DOCTOR**



USE SELF-CARE



SELF-CARE

- Have your child rest in a dark, quiet room with his or her eyes closed.
- Rub the base of your child's head with your thumbs. Start under the ears and work back. Rub the temples, too.
- Give your child a warm bath.
- Put a cold washcloth over your child's eyes.
- Try to make your child feel safe and happy at home. If something is bothering them, help them talk about it.
- Give your child acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Make sure you give him or her the right kind and dose for his or her weight. (Note: Do not give aspirin. Aspirin and other medicine that have salicylates have been linked to Reye's Syndrome.)
- Take your child to the dentist for dental checkups.
- Make sure your child eats well at mealtime. Between meals, give your child healthy snacks, like fruit or cereal.