

Headaches

Headache is a relatively common problem among college students. Fortunately for most people, headaches are infrequent and do not interfere with normal activities.

However, some students experience severe and/or frequent headaches that result in loss of time from school and other activities.

What causes headaches?

There are numerous types and causes of headaches. The most common types of headaches are tension headaches and migraine headaches, which together make up 80% of headaches seen in medical offices.

Other common, but less frequent, types of headaches are those secondary to sinus infection and “analgesic rebound” headaches. Analgesic rebound headaches are caused by the overuse of pain medications (i.e., Alleve®, Excedrin®, Motrin®) and are most often seen in people with frequent headaches.

- What causes headaches
- Should I see a doctor about my headaches?
- What can I do about my headaches?
- Where do I go from here?

Should I see a doctor about my headaches?

Any headache which is new and severe, persistent, or frequent should be evaluated by a medical practitioner. If your headaches interfere with your normal activities or bother you in other ways, you should see a medical practitioner to determine the cause of the headaches.

Evaluation procedures often include answering a series of questions and a brief examination, but may sometimes involve more extensive testing to determine the cause(s) of the headaches. Before you come in for an evaluation it is helpful if you note some of the characteristics of your headaches:

- **what the pain is like**
- **where it hurts**
- **how often it occurs**
- **how long it lasts**
- **what makes it better**
- **what makes it worse.**

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What can I do about my headaches?

Lifestyle has a significant effect on the frequency and severity of headaches.

Most headache sufferers find that their headaches improve or disappear if they:

- Exercise moderately on a regular basis.
- Avoid skipping meals. In fact, smaller, more frequent meals (5-6 per day) have been shown to reduce the frequency of migraine headaches.
- Limit caffeine intake and use alcohol in moderation, no more than one drink a day.
- Maintain a regular sleep schedule. Get up and go to bed about the same times every day. If you have problems with headaches on holidays or weekends it may be due to a change in sleep hours (too much or too little).
- Practice relaxation and biofeedback techniques on a regular basis.

Where do I go from here?

Make an appointment with a Schiffert Health Center (SHC) medical practitioner to evaluate the cause(s) of your headaches. This is particularly important if your headaches are new, severe, persistent, or limit your normal activities.

Attend the “relaxation training class” given by the Cook Counseling Center (CCC). Please call the Cook Counseling Center at **231-6557** for dates and times. Usually you do not need to make an appointment, just show up (CCC is located on the second floor of McComas Hall). This class teaches three different types of relaxation techniques, so you can learn the best one for you. You may attend as many times as you like. Several studies have demonstrated both short and long term improvement of headaches using biofeedback and relaxation techniques.

Remember that you have to practice the relaxation technique of your choice regularly to gain benefit!