

HEALTH IN OUR HANDS!

The Arkansas State University Wellness Program Newsletter
www.astate.edu/conhp



Headache Prevention & Mitigation

Overview

The previous Health in Our Hands issue focused on the symptoms and diagnostic criteria for tension, sinus, cluster, and migraine headaches. It is clear that headaches are a frequently occurring problem for much of the population. In fact, they are one of the most common health problems worldwide. This issue will center on preventing headaches and ways to lessen the severity of the symptoms.

Headache Prevention

Headache prevention should be the starting point for all headache sufferers. Prevention is easier than treatment, and can often result in a more headache free life. All headaches will not be prevented, but the frequency can be minimized with the following steps.

Step 1: Know your triggers

- Not all headache triggers can be controlled, but many can.

- Uncontrollable headache triggers
 - Weather
 - Hormone fluctuations with menstruation, ovulation, or menopause
 - Controllable headache triggers
 - Stress
 - Alcohol consumption (red wine in particular)
 - Dehydration
 - Too much or too little sleep
 - Exercising too rigorously
 - Hunger
 - Smoking or being exposed to smoke
 - Exposure to certain odors or perfumes
 - Birth control pills
 - Straining the eyes (reading or looking at a computer for too long)
 - Difference in caffeine intake, which can cause caffeine withdrawal headaches
 - Food additives
 - MSG
 - Nitrates found in processed meats
 - Tyramine found in aged cheese and soy based foods
 - Artificial sweeteners such as aspartame
 - Exposure to fluorescent lights
- Step 2: Keep a diary
- Keeping a diary helps the headache sufferer figure out his/her own personal headache triggers, which leads to future prevention.
 - Include the following in the diary:
 - Food/beverage consumption
 - Medications
 - Exercises
 - Hours of sleep
 - Hormonal changes
 - Log each headache, the time it occurred, and what was done to resolve it

Step 3: Everyday prevention

- The following are prevention techniques that can be implemented into your everyday life.
 - Maintain good posture
 - Head up, shoulders back, chin tucked
 - Keep moving
 - Walk around throughout the day
 - Rotate head to prevent neck stiffness
 - Get the right pillows
 - Travel with your home pillow instead of using the hotel pillows
 - Stick to a healthy diet and exercise routine
 - Don't skip meals
 - Have health snacks throughout the day
 - Do aerobic exercise at least 3-4 days/week
 - Drink water
 - Get enough sleep
 - 7-8 hours recommended
 - Wake up at the same time each day
 - Manage stress
 - Yoga
 - Breathing exercises
 - Favorite hobby
 - Avoid medication overuse

- Taking headache medicines more than twice a week can increase the frequency of headaches
- Consult with your doctor

Headache Mitigation

Once a headache hits, specifically a migraine, it can be difficult to find relief outside of medication. The following are a list of natural self help strategies to help calm down headache symptoms. The list mainly focuses on migraine mitigation, but can be applied to any headache.

- Lie down in a dark, quite room
- Put an ice pack around your head
 - Wrap the ice pack in a towel, do not apply it directly to your skin
 - Apply for 3-5 minutes
- Put a heating pad or warm towel on your shoulders
- Sip ginger ale if nauseated
- Smell essential oils
 - Peppermint oil
 - Lavender oil
 - Basil oil
- Scalp massage
- Biofeedback
 - Electronic sensors used to monitor body functions
 - Used to help people control body

functions and ultimately help control pain

*** *Talk with your doctor about proper medication use for headaches.**

References

- www.everydayhealth.com/headache-migraine/headache-prevention.aspx
- www.prevention.com/health/health-concerns/mitigating-migraine-miseries
- www.patienteducationcenter.org/articles/mitigating-migraine-pain-past-present-future/
- www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/chronic-daily-headaches/basics/prevention/con-20025386

Other News:

**If you have any suggestions for newsletter topics, please contact Dean Susan Hanrahan at hanrahan@astate.edu.

The Arkansas State University Employee Wellness Newsletter is published monthly during the academic year by the College of Nursing and Health Professions. Health questions can be addressed to Dean Susan Hanrahan, Ph.D., ext. 3112 or hanrahan@astate.edu. Produced by Jordan Hood, graduate student in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, Physical Therapy Program.