

About Headaches and Insomnia

Q1. : What are the causes of headaches?

A : There are two types of headaches: primary headaches and secondary headaches. Primary headaches are not associated with other diseases. Examples of primary headaches are migraine headaches and tension headaches. Secondary headaches are caused by associated disease. The associated disease may be minor or serious and life threatening.

Q2. : When should I consult a doctor for headaches?

A : Many people who suffer from mild headaches medicate themselves with over-the-counter analgesics, and they usually do not seek medical care. A person with a long history of migraine or tension headaches can develop a new secondary headache. Many tension headaches probably are migraine headaches and will respond to treatments that are specific for migraine. Therefore, a doctor should be consulted if the headache is:

- Severe ("the worst ever")
- Different than the usual headaches
- Starts suddenly during exertion
- Aggravated by exertion, coughing, bending, or sexual activity
- Associated with persistent nausea and vomiting
- Associated with stiff neck, fever, dizziness, blurred vision, slurred speech, unsteady gait, weakness or unusual sensations of the arm or leg, excessive drowsiness or confusion
- Associated with recent head trauma or a fall
- Disabling, and interfering with work and the quality of life

Q3. : How to prevent headaches?

A : The following healthy habits can lessen stress and reduce your chance of getting headaches:

- Getting adequate sleep
- Eating a healthy diet
- Exercising regularly
- Stretching your neck and upper body, especially if your work involves typing or using a computer
- Learning proper posture
- Quitting smoking
- Learning to relax using meditation, deep breathing, yoga, or other techniques

Q4. : Who is at risk for insomnia?

A : Insomnia is a common disorder. Insomnia affects women more often than men, and it can occur at any age. However, older adults are more likely to have insomnia than younger people. People especially prone to insomnia include those who are:

- Under a lot of stress
- Depressed or who have other emotional distress
- Working at night or having frequent major shifts in their work hours
- Traveling long distances across many time zones (jet lag)

Q5. : How to relieve insomnia?

A : Making healthy lifestyle changes can often relieve insomnia. Several medicines also can help relieve insomnia and re-establish a regular sleep schedule.

To relieve insomnia, you should:

- Make sure your bedroom is at a comfortable temperature, dark, and quiet enough for sleep
- Avoid substances such as caffeine, tobacco, alcoholic drink, and other stimulants taken close to bedtime (effects of caffeine can take as long as 8 hours to wear off)
- Good bedtime habits and following a routine that helps you wind down and relax before bed, such as reading a book, listening to soothing music, or taking a hot bath
- Not exercising, eating heavy meals, or drinking a lot shortly before bedtime
- Making your bedroom sleep-friendly. Avoid bright lighting and minimize possible sleep distractions, such as a TV, computer, or pet
- Going to sleep around the same time each night and waking up around the same time each morning, even on weekends. If possible, avoid night shifts or alternating schedules at work and other causes of irregular sleep schedules

Several medicines cause sleepiness. Doctors sometimes prescribe sleep-inducing medicine for 1 to 2 weeks to help establish a regular sleep schedule. Insomnia medicine helps you fall asleep, but can leave some people feeling groggy in the morning. You may also be groggy and should exercise caution if you must get up before getting a full night's sleep of 7 to 8 hours while taking these medicines.