Headache

Headaches are caused by many different problems. **Most commonly, headache is caused by muscle tension from an injury, fatigue or emotional upset.** Excessive muscle contractions in the scalp and neck result in a headache that often feels like a tight band around the head. Tension headaches often have areas of tenderness over the scalp and the back of the neck. These headaches may last for hours, days or longer, and some may contribute to migraines in those who have migraine problems.

Migraines usually cause a throbbing headache, which is made worse by activity. Sometimes only one side of the head hurts. Nausea, vomiting, eye pain, and avoidance of food are common with migraines. Visual symptoms such as light sensitivity, blind spots, or flashing lights may also occur. Loud noises may worsen migraine headaches. Many factors may cause migraine headaches:

- Emotional stress, lack of sleep, and menstrual periods
- Alcohol and some drugs (such as birth control pills)
- Diet factors (fasting, caffeine, food preservatives, chocolate)
- Environmental factors (weather changes, bright lights, odors, smoke)

Other causes of headaches include minor injuries to the head. Arthritis in the neck, problems with the jaw, eyes, ears, or nose are also causes of headaches. Allergies, drugs, alcohol, and exposure to smoke can also cause moderate headaches. Rebound headaches can occur if someone uses pain medications for a long period of time and then stops. Less commonly, blood vessel problems in the neck and brain (including stroke) can cause various types of headache. **Nervous system infections and brain tumors can cause bad headaches, but these are rare.**

Treatment of headaches includes medicines for pain and relaxation. Ice packs or heat applied to the back of the head and neck help some people. Massaging the shoulders, neck and scalp are often very useful. Relaxation techniques and stretching can help prevent these headaches. Avoid alcohol and cigarette smoking as these tend to make headaches worse. **Please see your caregiver if your headache is not better in 2 days**.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop a high fever, chills, or repeated vomiting.
- You faint or have difficulty with vision.
- You develop unusual numbness or weakness of your arms or legs.
- Relief of pain is inadequate with medication, or you develop severe pain.
- You develop confusion, or neck stiffness.
- You have a worsening of a headache or do not obtain relief.

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