Tension Headache
(Muscle Contraction Headache)

You have been diagnosed as having a tension headache. This is one of the most common causes of head pain. These headaches are usually felt as a pain over the top of your head and back of your neck. Stress, anxiety, and depression are common triggers for these headaches. Tension headaches are not life threatening and will not lead to other types of headaches. Tension headaches can often be diagnosed by a history from the patient and a physical exam. Sometimes, further lab and x-ray studies are used to confirm the *diagnosis* (learning what is wrong). Your caregiver can help you solve personal problems causing anxiety or stress. Antidepressants can be prescribed if depression is a problem.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- **If testing was done, call for your results**. Remember, it is **your responsibility** to get the results of all testing. *Do not assume everything is fine because you do not hear from your caregiver.*
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Biofeedback, massage, or other relaxation techniques may be helpful.
- Ice packs or heat to the head and neck can be used. Use these three to four times per day or as needed.
- Physical therapy may be a useful addition to treatment.
- If headaches continue, even with therapy, you may need to think about lifestyle changes.
- Avoid excessive use of pain killers, as rebound headaches can occur.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop problems with medications prescribed.
- You do not respond or obtain no relief from medications.
- You have a change from the usual headache.
- You develop *nausea* (feeling sick to your stomach) or vomiting.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- If your headache becomes severe.
- You have an unexplained oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), or as your caregiver suggests.
- You have a stiff neck.
- You have loss of vision.
- You have muscular weakness.
- You have loss of muscular control.
- You develop severe symptoms different from your first symptoms.
- You start losing your balance or have trouble walking.
- You feel faint or pass out.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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