

How to head off an ice cream headache

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(HealthDay)—Slow down and savor your ice cream sundae or smoothie—it's the best way to prevent the dreaded head pain commonly known as "brain freeze."

"When you consume cold foods or drinks too fast, it cools down the [carotid artery](#) located just behind your jawline. Doing that chills the blood going to your [brain](#)," explained Dr. Greg McLauchlin, an assistant professor of neurology at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

"When it gets too cold, alarms go off and that activates [nerve pain](#) telling you to stop and back away from the smoothie!" he said in a college news release.

The medical name for [brain freeze](#) is sphenopalatine neuralgia, and it's more of a reflex than a true headache, McLauchlin said.

Though an ice cream [headache](#) doesn't do any long-term harm, there are things you can do to avoid those few seconds of intense pain, he added.

Try to enjoy your cold treat slowly. If that's not possible, warming your mouth quickly with a warm drink might help.

Believe it or not, brain freeze isn't all bad.

McLauchlin noted that the condition has provided doctors with insight into cluster headaches. These are severe headaches that occur on one side of the head and are associated with red or teary eyes, runny or stuffy nose, facial flushing or sweating, or a sense of restlessness and agitation.

"The same area that causes brain freeze is also involved in cluster headaches. We treat cluster headaches by using a sphenopalatine block, basically numbing up the area involved in brain freeze," McLauchlin said.

More information: Harvard Medical School has more on [brain freeze](#).

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