

Home remedies: Self-care measures to relieve tension-type headaches

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Frequent headaches can interfere with your daily life. But healthy lifestyle choices can help you head off the pain. Start with the basics, including diet, exercise and relaxation.

Nearly everyone is familiar with the pain of tension-type headaches. But

that doesn't mean that the world stops when the pain strikes. Over-the-counter or [prescription medications](#) may help, but simply taking good care of yourself also can help prevent a pounding headache.

Make Healthy Lifestyle Choices

A healthy lifestyle can promote good overall health and help prevent tension-type headaches. Here are the basics:

Eat healthy foods. Don't skip meals, especially breakfast, and drink plenty of water each day.

Exercise regularly. Exercise releases chemicals in your body that block pain signals to the brain. With your doctor's permission, choose any exercise you enjoy, whether that's walking, swimming or cycling. Start slowly; exercising too vigorously can trigger some types of headaches.

Get enough sleep. Wake up and go to bed at the same time every day—even on weekends. Relax before you go to bed. If you don't fall asleep within 15 minutes, get up and read or do something soothing until you're drowsy. Avoid medications (including some headache medications) that contain [caffeine](#) and other stimulants that can affect sleep.

Avoid excess caffeine. While caffeine may help curb headaches, heavy daily caffeine use—more than 400 milligrams of caffeine a day (about four regular cups of coffee) - can cause headaches and irritability. Chronic caffeine use also increases the risk of headaches, as does quitting caffeine altogether—whether you quit suddenly or cut back gradually.

Quit smoking. The nicotine in [cigarette smoke](#) reduces [blood flow](#) to the brain, and triggers a reaction in the nerves at the back of the throat,

which may lead to a headache.

Keep Stress Under Control

Stress and tension-type headaches often go hand in hand. To reduce stress, try these simple tips:

Simplify your life. Don't look for ways to squeeze more activities or chores into the day; instead find things you can leave out.

Take a break. If you feel overwhelmed, a few slow stretches or a quick walk may renew your energy levels.

Exhale. When you feel your stress levels rising, take several deep breaths and count to 10.

Adjust your attitude. Think positive thoughts. Don't think that something is impossible; tell yourself that you are up to the challenge.

Let go. Don't worry about things you can't control.

Ease Muscle Tension

Tense muscles can trigger tension-type headaches. Apply heat or ice to relieve tense neck and shoulder muscles. Use a heating pad set on low, a hot water bottle, a hot shower or bath, a warm compress, or a hot towel. Or apply an ice pack (wrapped in a cloth) or a cool washcloth across the forehead.

Massage also can relieve muscle tension—and sometimes [headache](#) pain. Gently massage your temples, scalp, neck and shoulders with your fingertips, or gently stretch the neck.

Relax

Take time to unwind every day. Try this deep-breathing exercise:

Lie down on your back or sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor; hands in your lap.

Imagine yourself in a peaceful place, perhaps a beach or quiet forest. Keep this scene in your mind.

Inhale and exhale slowly and deeply for at least 10 minutes.

When you're done, sit quietly for a minute or two.

Try to practice these breathing exercises or another form of relaxation every day.

Keep A Headache Diary

A diary may help you determine what triggers your tension-type headaches. Note when your headaches start, your activities, how long the headaches last and anything that provides relief. The diary may help you spot patterns in your daily habits that contribute to your tension-type headaches.

Look for improvements in your headaches as you make additional healthy lifestyle changes.

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