

Half of the world's population suffers from headaches

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Every single day, one in six people on the planet has a headache. Half of them experience pain severe enough to be considered migraines.

Headaches can be painful and disabling.

Some people get [headaches](#) due to stress. Other headaches result from overusing medications like painkillers.

Researchers reviewed 357 articles

A research team has arrived at the findings through a large-scale review of several hundred publications. The review highlights just how common headache struggles are.

"Headaches are a real and extremely frequent disorder. The condition is widespread in countries everywhere—although there can be differences," says Lars Jacob Stovner, a professor at NTNU.

Stovner and his colleagues identified 357 articles published between 1961 and the end of 2020.

The articles covered different countries and time periods, and varied in their analytical approaches. Nevertheless, the research team was able to analyze the data to explore the prevalence of headache disorders around the world.

The results published in *The Journal of Headache and Pain* indicate that more than half of the world's population has an active headache disorder.

Confirms previous findings on headaches

Headache prevalence is described as having experienced some type of headache over the past year. Further analyses revealed that just under 16 percent of people around the world had a headache on any given day.

While many of the studies did not report specific headache types, those that did suggest that approximately seven percent of the global population experience migraines on any given day, and almost nine percent experience a tension headache.

The review also highlighted that the incidence of headaches varied by gender, with 17 percent of women suffering from migraines in a given year, compared with 8.6 percent of men.

Getting headaches for 15 or more days a month was also much more common in women.

Stovner says the general findings are consistent with previous estimates of the incidence of headaches, including the [Global Burden of Disease Study](#).

Working age adults are hardest hit

Stovner and his colleagues have previously found that migraines are the leading cause of disability for people under the age of 50.

"A lot of other bodily pains increase as we approach retirement age. Migraines and headaches are most prevalent in the most active years of our life," says Stovner, who also works with the Global Campaign against Headache.

He adds that headaches can have multiple causes—from an individual's genetics to stress, sleep problems and overuse of medication.

Stovner emphasizes that many options exist for preventing headache disorders or treating them when they occur.

"Headache woes are something the health service needs to take seriously.

We have to inform the public, [decision-makers](#) and [health services](#) about this huge public health problem. We need to put a good system into place that gives everyone with these ailments access to good treatment, as well as to knowledge that enables them to reduce the negative impact as much as possible," he says.

More information: Lars Jacob Stovner et al, The global prevalence of headache: an update, with analysis of the influences of methodological factors on prevalence estimates, *The Journal of Headache and Pain* (2022). [DOI: 10.1186/s10194-022-01402-2](https://doi.org/10.1186/s10194-022-01402-2)

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