

Headaches and the heat—what really is causing the pain?

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Credit: Sasha Wolff/Wikipedia

While the summer heat may be a pain, does it actually cause headaches? A Baylor College of Medicine expert says headaches that seem to be caused by the heat might actually be due to dehydration.

When the body becomes dehydrated is it believed to trigger a headache due to narrowing [blood vessels](#) as the body loses water and electrolytes. When a person is dehydrated they are more likely to suffer from heat stroke, and a headache is sometimes a symptom of that, among other telling signs such as high body temperature, nausea, [rapid breathing](#) and [rapid heartbeat](#).

"If you are already prone to headaches, such as migraines, this could be a trigger," said Dr. Doris Kung, assistant professor of neurology at Baylor. "One way to try to prevent this type of headache is by drinking plenty of water when you are spending

the day outside and taking a break from activity."

However, Kung said headaches shouldn't be ignored if they are frequent or are accompanied by neurological symptoms like weakness, numbness, slurred speech or altered mental activity.

"These could be the sign of a larger problem," said Kung. "You should also see a doctor if you suddenly start to suffer from headaches when you normally didn't or begin to suffer from a different type of headache than what is normal for you."

While over-the-counter headache medications can help for the average headache, if taken too often, it could actually cause more pain.

"You can develop a condition called rebound headaches when taking too much over-the-counter medicine. Use of OTC pain relievers 15 or more days out of the month can result in more headaches," said Kung.

If someone is interested in eliminating OTC pain killers to manage headaches, it is important to identify triggers first, and then work on avoiding them. Some simple steps shown to help lessen certain types of [headaches](#) include staying hydrated, sleeping regularly, eating regular healthy meals and exercising.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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