

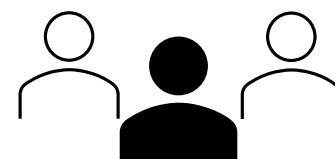
Tension headaches information pack

Information for young people

There are two common types of headache in children: **migraine** and **tension** headaches.

You have **TENSION** headaches. These are the **most common** type of headache in children and adults.

Around 1 in 2 young people are thought to get tension headaches and the number of young people with headaches increases from childhood into adolescence. (Baglioni et al., 2023)



Tension headaches are safe and not dangerous, but they can be painful and problematic for some people.

What is it and what does it feel like?

There are two types of tension headaches:

1. Episodic tension headaches - those that occur less than half the time
(i.e. less than 15 days per month)
2. Chronic tension headaches - those that occur more than half the time
(i.e. more than 15 days per month).

Other than the frequency, all tension headaches have similar features such as:

- A throbbing, squeezing or pressure feeling all over the head (like when you put an elastic band around your head).
- Lasting between 30 minutes and 7 days, or can feel like it's always there.
- Getting worse as the day goes on.
- Making it hard to sleep and/or eat.

Tension headaches may stop you engaging in some activities.

Why do some people get them and not others?

We do not know why some people get headaches more than others, but we do know that feeling worried or stressed is often involved.

The biopsychosocial model

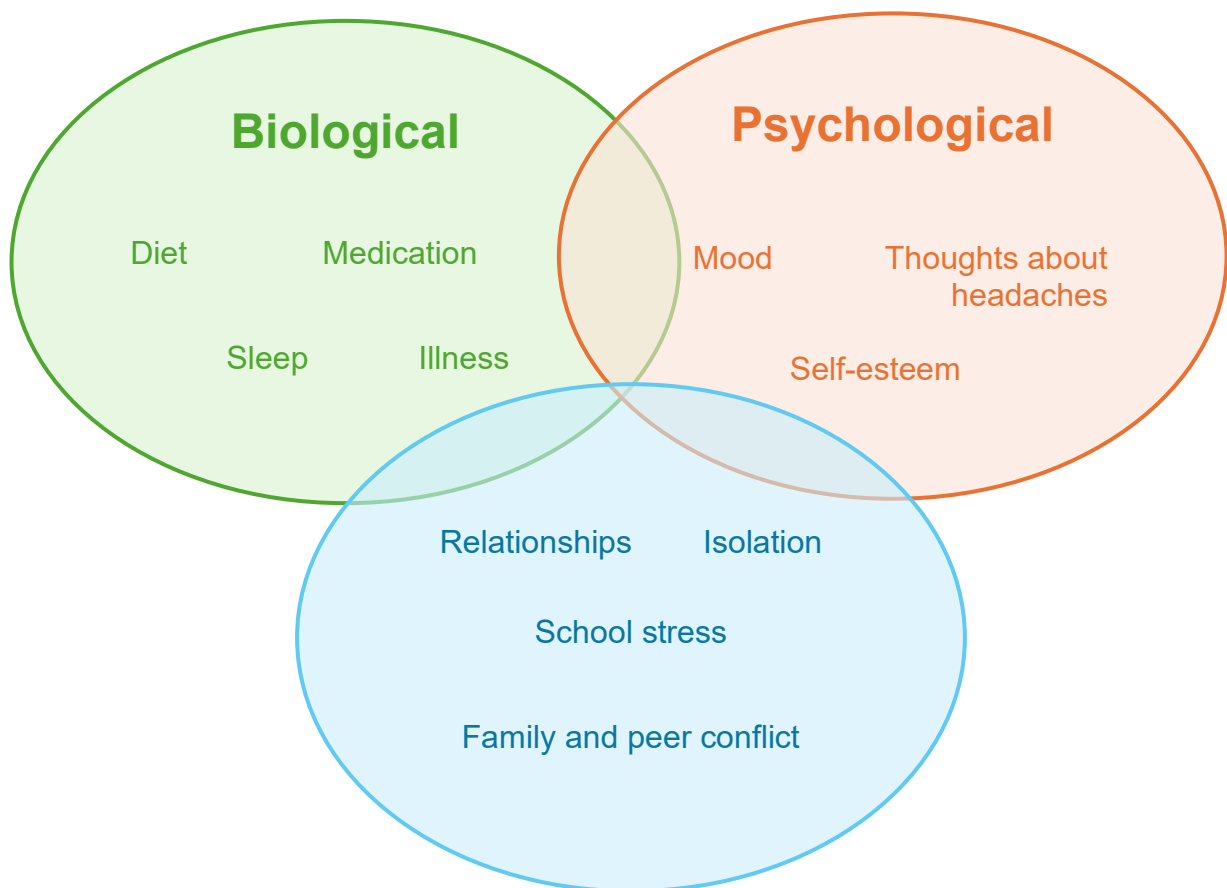
The biopsychosocial model looks at how our bodies, minds, and the world around us affect our tension headaches;

biological factors (what the body does – think about eating, any medication we take, how much sleep we get, if we are unwell),

social factors (the world around us – think about other people like friends, family, teachers, and maybe even our doctors too),

psychological factors (how we feel – think about your mood, if you are stressed out, thoughts you have about yourself and others).

The model proposes that good migraine management requires **all** aspects of the model to be working well.



Why is this important?

1. Headaches can be triggered by psychological stressors.
2. Headaches themselves can be a cause of significant psychological stress which can, in turn, make the problem worse.
3. Even if psychological stress is not significantly involved in the origin of the headache, pain management techniques can help people cope with their pain more effectively, meaning the headache has less of an impact on everyday life.

So what can be done about it?

The 'psycho' section of the **biopsychosocial** model tells us that our emotions and behaviours affect our headaches. So, whilst it is not possible to control some things (like the weather or having to do a test or go to a meeting) it is clear that how you **feel** and what you **do** can affect your headaches, in both positive and negative ways.

Examples of how to manage each part of the biopsychosocial model:

- **Bio** - taking prescribed medication
- **Psycho** - managing worries and stress
- **Social** - pacing our activities and not doing too much or too little.

Therefore, whilst you might be prescribed pain relief for your headaches, it is very important to try and incorporate some emotional and behavioural strategies into your everyday life, that we know can make headaches better.

Preventing headaches: noticing triggers

Headache trigger	What can I do about it?
Intense emotions such as worry, stress or anger	<p>Communicate your worries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ Talk to a teacher, a parent, a partner, a relative, a friend, or even a pet! ✧ Paint, draw or design a worry box about your worries. ✧ It might be helpful to speak to school/ your parents/ your GP about a referral to a service that can help if you feel that you are really struggling with your emotions and/or mood. ✧ Learning to cope with stress and anxiety are really important in everyday life as well as headache management - take a look at the resources section at the back of this booklet for a list of useful websites and apps. <p>Relax</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ Breathing exercises ✧ Tightening your muscles and then letting them feel loose again (this can help release tension) ✧ Listening to relaxing music ✧ Having a bath ✧ Anything else you find relaxing!
Skipping meals or irregular eating patterns	<p>Eat enough and regularly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ Work out what time breakfast, lunch and tea works for you and your family and stick to it - no skipping meals or missing breakfast! ✧ Eat healthy snacks if you feel like you need to in between.
Dehydration and not drinking enough	<p>Drink 8 glasses of water a day</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ Or squash (sometimes) but avoid drinks like coca-cola or irn bru because they have caffeine in them which can make your headache

	worse.
Eating some types of foods	<p>Avoid foods that give you a headache</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ Such as cheese, chocolate and hamburgers.
Doing too much or too little activity, including strenuous or competitive sports	<p>Exercise regularly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ People who have headaches who exercise regularly say they have fewer headaches ✧ Doing too much all at once can give you a headache, but if you exercise regularly then your brain gets used to it. Don't over-do it though! ✧ Try to exercise for 30 - 60 minutes every day - walking, running and cycling are all good ideas. Exercise also helps to reduce feelings of worry.
Not getting enough sleep or having an irregular sleep routine	<p>Rest and sleep</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ Wind down in the evening without screens, bright lights and noises. ✧ Books, podcasts and music are all great activities to do before bed. ✧ It is important to get up and go to bed at roughly the same time every day (a wee lie-in at the weekends is okay though)
Tension in the muscles of the neck and head	<p>Stretch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ Tension can be due to squinting and not sitting properly. ✧ Stretching the muscles in your neck and head can help with these types of headaches and you might find it relaxing too. ✧ Why not try some yoga?
Weather changes, particularly cold weather	Wrap up warmly and try to wear a hat if needed.
Bright lights and loud noises	Use sunglasses, headphones and ear defenders as necessary.
Doing too much or too little	<p>PLAN your time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ Planning time to rest and time for fun activities is key in preventing and managing headaches.
Too much screen time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too much screen time can affect our sleep, mood and eyesight. The bright light disrupts the hormones that help us sleep, and may make you irritable or unable to focus with too much use • Try slow activities before bed, like reading or mindfulness activities like painting or using a diary • Try some time outdoors, however you prefer – a walk, a bike ride, a jog with family or friends. This takes time away from a screen • Keep your phone out of your bedroom and set times away from it for social time (in real life!)

IMPORTANT



Keep your **sleep**, **eating** and **exercising** in a **ROUTINE**

Your brain and body learn to expect things to happen in a certain order when you have a routine. Breaking routines regularly can affect your blood and brain and give you a headache. This is why it is important to get up and go to bed at round about the same time every day.

Doing all of these things might not make the headaches go away completely but hopefully they will reduce how often they happen, how much they hurt and how much they affect your life.

Identifying triggers

If we can work out what's happening **before** your headaches and what is **helping** and **not helping** then we should be able to find some strategies that will help. This is why we ask you to keep a headache diary. If you do this a pattern may emerge - for example you might find out that eating a certain type of food always precedes a headache. Then you can work out what your headache "triggers" are, and you can avoid as many of them as possible, leading to fewer headaches.

Look out for the following things and note them in your headache diary (see next page):

- Trigger (what was happening before your headache)
- Any pattern to your migraines
- What helps
- What doesn't help.

Headache diary to record your triggers – here is an example below:

When did it start?	How long did it last?	Where did it happen?	What was happening beforehand?	What did it feel like?	How much did it hurt? (0 = no pain - 10 = lots of pain)	What did you do?	Did anything help?
<i>8am Monday morning</i>	<i>45 minutes</i>	<i>On the way to school in the car</i>	<i>I did not sleep well and I was worried about school</i>	<i>A throbbing pain all over my head</i>	<i>7 - hurt quite a lot but not the worst pain ever</i>	<i>Told my mum, drank some water and sat still</i>	<i>Drinking water and sitting still with my eyes closed</i>

Why don't you have a go at designing your own? Make sure you include all of the questions above! And any other information you think is important.

Look at your migraine diary. Pick the top 3 strategies that have helped and write them here:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Tension headache plan: Responding to headaches

When you get a tension headache, these steps can help:

Tell someone. Headaches often get worse when you're worried about something, so talking to your teacher/parent might be really useful.



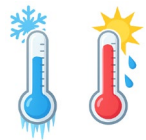
Eat/drink something



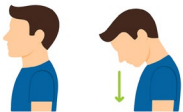
Take some medication (only if it has been agreed with your doctor).

Sit or lie in a dark and quiet room (maybe have a nap if you need to).

Distract yourself - try some gentle music, a familiar book or talking to someone.



Change temperature - trying popping something warm or cool on the part of your body that hurts, like an ice-pack or heated cushion, or have a bath/shower.



If there is a specific part of your head or neck that hurts, gentle stretching, loosening of muscles and applying heat can help.

Try some relaxation - deep breathing and/or listening to music and think about a time you were happy and relaxed. See the list of useful apps for more ideas.

Try some gentle exercise such as a walk.

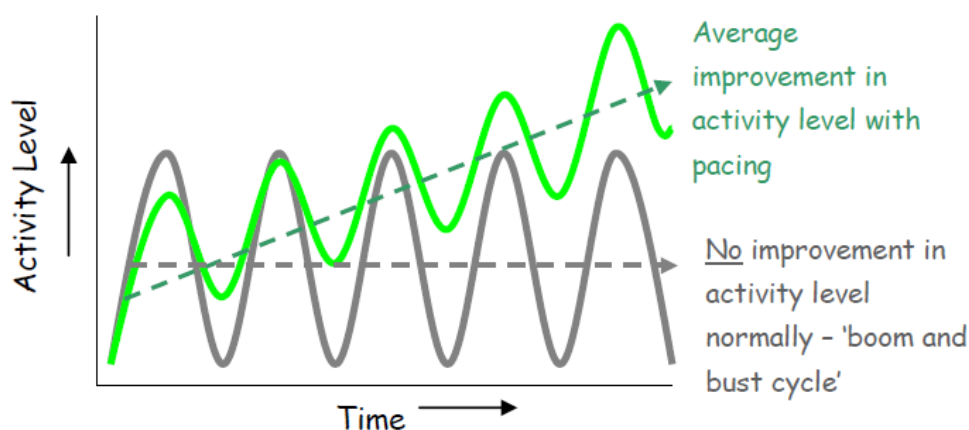
Think coping thoughts! Remember all of the times before that you have managed to cope with the pain and felt better afterwards.

Remember - you don't have to try all of these at once! It's important to work out what works for YOU. When you've tried something and it has helped your headaches, it's helpful to write it down so you know what works for next time.

Why is planning so important? The Boom-Bust cycle

It can be easy to fall into the habit of ‘overdoing it’ especially when you’re feeling enthusiastic about something or having a ‘good’ pain day with your headaches (e.g. boom of energy). When you’ve done too much or get a ‘bad’ pain day, you may notice that you become rather tired and need extra rest to make up for the extra stuff that you’ve been doing (e.g. bust of energy).

These habits can result in an uneven pattern where your energy and activity levels are going up and down a lot and this can **increase feelings of stress and make pain worse**.



We know that this pattern of pushing ourselves when we have more energy, leading to burn out and more need for rest, can affect the way pain signals are sent to the brain. This can then make headaches more frequent and more painful.

What can we do about this?





Pacing is about learning to manage your energy more evenly, varying the intensity of activity and taking short regular breaks to avoid over doing it:

- Taking breaks or doing more chilled activities helps maintain energy level and concentration.
- It can also be about learning to do things in a series of steps rather than rushing to do everything at once. It involves learning to plan your time and setting realistic goals for yourself.
- Building fun activities into the day can lift your spirits and take your mind off pain and worries. Planning little treats for yourself around challenging or boring tasks can also help energy and motivation by giving you something to “look forward to” e.g. watching a favourite TV programme after doing the washing up, planning a trip to the cinema with friends to celebrate the end of your exams.




When might I need more help?


It is important to do something if your headache **changes** - if they start happening **more often** or become **more painful**, or if you start to experience **different things**, such as severe nausea. If you are worried about your headaches it is worth speaking to your doctor.

Suggested Resources

App	Helpful for...
Smiling Mind 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age: suitable for all ages • Provides different guided relaxation and mindfulness exercises • Free
Head Space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age: older children and adolescents • Provides mindfulness exercises • Has a free trial
Calm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age: older children and adolescents • Provides relaxation exercises including a visual aid for controlled breathing techniques
Relax Lite 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age: older children and adolescents • Provides relaxation exercises including a visual aid for controlled breathing techniques

Websites and supports

<p>NHS Inform pain self-help guide for teenagers and adults: www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health/mental-health-self-help-guides/chronic-pain-self-help-guide</p>	
<p>An animated video to help understand functional abdominal pain: www.youtube.com/watch?v=65PeQyvQBHE</p>	
<p>Children's Health Scotland offer online groups called SMS: Connect to help you to improve the relationship you have with your health and build your confidence and self-esteem. By taking part you can develop skills that can help you cope better with your health condition and give you an opportunity to connect with other children and young people with health conditions. You can refer yourself to the group on the website below. https://www.childrenshealthscotland.org/service/smsconnect/</p>	

<p>Stress Control teaches skills to fight stress and boost your wellbeing: https://stresscontrol.org/stress-control</p>	
<p>Health Professionals for Safer Screens includes resources and information on smartphone use and harmful online content. https://healthprofessionalsforsaferscreens.org/</p>	