

# Kids & HEADACHES



## How to prevent and treat your child's headache



We tend to think of **headaches** as a pain that comes with adulthood, but kids get them, too. Most of the time, kids' headaches aren't serious. Here's what you need to know, according to Pennie Schultz, MD, of Centura Health Physician Group Pediatrics NorthCare.

### Cause → Stress.

Math quizzes, prom dates, what to take for show-and-tell. These all can cause serious stress among adolescents, teens, and even children. And just as in adults, that stress can cause headaches.

**WHAT TO DO:** When stress headaches are infrequent, acetaminophen or ibuprofen, in child-appropriate doses, can help. If your child is suffering with chronic stress headaches, talk with him to try and identify possible ongoing stresses, such as bullying, trouble in class, or worry about a family situation. With chronic stress-caused headaches, counseling might help. Another option could be relaxation techniques such as deep-breathing exercises or meditation.



### Cause → Not enough fluids.

This is especially true for adolescents and teens who may not drink enough water or may skip meals.

**WHAT TO DO:** Make sure kids are drinking plenty of water or naturally flavored water (try putting cut-up fruit into their water to make it more appealing). Sodas, caffeinated beverages, and energy drinks won't help. In fact, they actually cause dehydration. Excessive caffeine also can cause headaches.

### Cause → Food sensitivity.

Our stomachs aren't the only place we feel it when our bodies aren't happy with the food we eat. Certain foods, including those with nitrates, such as bacon and hot dogs, can contribute to headaches.

**WHAT TO DO:** Track your child's food intake or if she is old enough, encourage her to keep a food journal. Eliminate any food that seems to trigger headaches.



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## Cause → Vision problems.

Squinting to see in the distance, or deciphering blurred letters up close can cause headaches.

**WHAT TO DO:** Schedule an eye exam.



You should have your child's eyes examined at ages 6 months and 3 years, and again in first grade; then every two years after that.

## Cause → Migraine.

Though most common in adults, kids do get migraines. Migraines are exceptionally painful headaches, usually accompanied by nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light and sound, and vision disturbances.

**WHAT TO DO:** Migraines can be triggered by certain foods, and by stress, irregular eating habits and, in girls who have reached puberty, by hormonal changes. Fortunately, migraines rarely last as long in children as they do in adults. Acetaminophen and ibuprofen in kid-appropriate doses can help relieve pain. Your child's pediatrician may be able to prescribe stronger medications if needed, but never give a child any pain reliever other than acetaminophen or ibuprofen without consulting a doctor. Sleep; rest in a cool, dark room; and cold compresses help as well.



### *When to see* **THE DOCTOR**

Most headaches aren't serious, but check with your physician or care provider if your child's headaches:

- Wake him up at night
- Worsen or become more frequent
- Occur more than once a month
  - Interfere with school work
  - Follow an injury

### *Head to the* **URGENT CARE or ER**

*if your child's headaches:*

- Cause changes in behavior or she acts or talks confused
- Include vomiting or visual changes
- Make it hard to wake him up
- Are accompanied by fever and neck pain or stiffness

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