



Tension Headache



Overview

This is a common type of headache that can be painful and frustrating for many people. It tends to start in the back of the head and then move forward to surround your head.

Causes

The exact cause of tension headaches is not fully understood. They were once believed to be caused by tense, contracted muscles in the neck and head. But research has shown they may be linked to a heightened sensitivity to pain and stress. This may stem from changes in brain chemicals called "neurotransmitters."

Triggers

A tension headache can be triggered by stress, anxiety or fatigue. It can result from eye strain. It can be triggered by holding your head in one position for a long time. This can be a problem if you work with a computer all day, especially if your desk and chair are not set up comfortably for you. Medications can cause tension headaches. Alcohol and drug use can, too. Some other triggers include overexertion, depression, arthritis, hormonal changes and certain foods.

Symptoms

The most common symptom of a tension headache is mild to moderate pain in your head. This pain is dull and aching. It can feel like a tight band surrounding your head. The muscles of your neck and shoulders may feel tense and tender. Your pain may last for a short time or for days. It may recur, and become a chronic problem.

Treatment

Treatment options depend on the cause and the severity of your headaches. You may benefit from medications. These can reduce your pain. They can reduce the frequency of your headaches. You may also benefit from relaxation techniques and a healthier lifestyle. Your healthcare provider can recommend a care plan that is right for your needs.