

# HEADACHES A COMMON PROBLEM

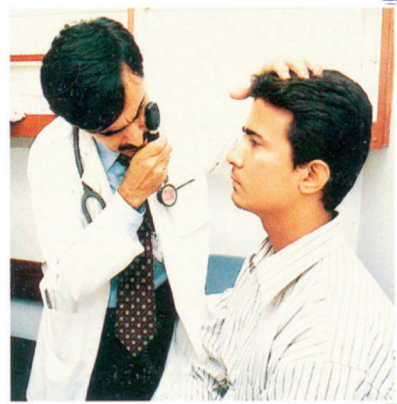


## What Further Steps will be Taken Once I Visit the Headache Clinic?

After the initial registration and evaluation, a detailed history will be taken from you to ascertain the kind of problem you are likely to have. This will be followed by a general and neurological examination. You will be explained as to the likely problem that you have. An appropriate advice on the management will be given, which will include the need for medications as well as the other steps that you should take. Where necessary, you may be advised to undergo tests, which may include a brain scan, blood tests, etc that might be considered necessary to assist in the diagnosis and management. It is important that the medications be taken as advised. Where necessary, further evaluation, e.g., with a clinical psychologist, or referral to another specialized service. e.g., ENT, Ophthalmology, etc may be done. You will be asked to come for a follow up after an appropriate interval. At the Headache Clinic at the AKUH, the Clinical Nurse Educator can be contacted during this interval between appointments, should you have any queries or run into unexpected problems.

## Headache Clinic

The Headache Clinic at the AKUH is staffed by neurologists and other professionals who have a special interest and training in the diagnosis and management of headaches. It would be the endeavor of this service to offer the latest in diagnosis and management of various headache disorders, which is in line with current international standards. The aim would be to give the best advice and offer maximum relief to patients.



For further information, please contact:

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## Why do Headaches Occur ?

Headache is a very common symptom, and can occur as a result of a variety of problems.

It should be remembered that headache is a symptom of an underlying disease, and not a disease itself. The underlying problem stimulates various structures in the skull, e.g., the nerve endings, muscles, blood vessels, eyes, the ear apparatus, the sinuses, etc, and it is the involvement of these structures as a result of the underlying disease process that can lead to headaches.

## What are the Common Causes of Headaches ?

Headache can be caused by a number of problems. Broadly, headaches can be classified into Primary Headaches and Secondary Headaches. By primary headaches we mean that these headaches, though present, do not have an obvious underlying cause in the brain or the body. By secondary headaches, we mean that the headaches are due to some underlying cause that has been established.

## What are the Type of Primary Headaches ?

The most common types of primary headaches are migraines and tension type headaches. Cluster headaches and a few other primary kinds of headaches exist, but are relatively uncommon. Primary headaches constitute about 90% of all headaches.

## What are the Common Causes of Secondary Headaches ?

As mentioned earlier, by secondary headaches we mean those headaches that are due to an underlying cause. Common causes include problems related to the eyes, e.g., vision defects leading to eyestrain, or conditions like increased eye pressure (glaucoma) that is seen in the elderly. Then there are problems related to the ear, nose and throat, e.g., sinusitis, or upper respiratory tract infections, etc. Dental problems can also lead to headaches. Other causes of secondary headaches include hypertension (increased blood pressure), post head injury, inflammation of the blood vessels of the skull (arteritis), brain tumors, brain hemorrhages etc. By and large, secondary headaches account for roughly 10% of all reported headaches.

**I have severe headaches. I am worried that I may have one of the serious underlying problems that you have mentioned. Please help.**

Although it is true that headaches can be due to serious underlying problems, these are fortunately uncommon. For example, 90% of headaches are primary, meaning thereby, that although these can be severe, there is no underlying secondary problem. Even if there is a secondary problem, the chances of having a serious underlying problem are still lower. For example, brain tumors account for only 0.1% of all headaches. It is extremely important to understand this fact, and avoid undue anxiety.

It is common to experience headaches in specific situations, e.g., stress, or an underlying infection, etc, and nothing needs to be done about such headaches, except taking routine pain killers and attending to the underlying cause. However if you are having severe headaches which are interfering with your daily life-especially if these are recurrent, you should report to your doctor so that an exact diagnosis can be established and appropriate treatment if any, can be given.

## Is there a Need to do a Brain Scan for Every Case of Headache?

No. By and large, a detailed case history and physical examination is all you're your doctor needs to make the right diagnosis of headaches in the majority of cases. The need for a brain scan arises only if your doctor suspects that the headaches are due to some underlying cause.

## What is a Headache Clinic ?

A headache clinic is a specialized service which evaluates those kinds of patients whose headaches are not responsive to treatment, or those whose headaches are undiagnosed, or those in whom the primary physician feels that they need to be further evaluated for proper diagnosis and control. A Headache Clinic is staffed by specialists who have a special interest in the management of such disorders. It is usually staffed by neurologists, with assistance from specialized nurse educators and facilities for further specialised referral where necessary.

## Does Every Patient With Headaches Require Visiting the Headache Clinic ?

No. Your family doctor or your referring physician would be competent to diagnose and appropriately advise in the majority of cases of headaches. The services of a Headache Clinic are usually necessary only in a small number of those patients who continue to have problems despite appropriate advice. The decision for the referral should be left to your doctor.