

EYE-Q

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Headaches and Eye Strain

Headaches are a very common health problem. They can have many different causes including eye problems. A complete medical history and physical exam will help to rule out serious medical conditions that may also give you headaches.

The most common cause of headaches is scalp and neck muscle contractions. Tension, anxiety, strain, stress, fatigue and depression may all bring about sudden or gradual muscle contractions and pain. Many diseases and disorders affecting other parts of the body can also cause headaches. For example, ear problems, jaw problems, sinus problems, arthritis, high blood pressure, nerve diseases, certain blood vessel diseases and even tumors and aneurysms can cause headaches.

Migraine headaches are another common form of headache that have eye related symptoms. This type of headache is more complex and we will save its discussion for another day.

Rarely, eye problems cause headaches. For example, if you need glasses and squint to see clearly, you may develop eyestrain and a headache. Also, if certain of your eye muscles are too weak to keep your eyes aligned when you are reading, this could cause headaches. Interestingly, this is one of the few types of eye problems that can be corrected with exercises for the eye muscles.

Proper treatment of headaches varies depending on the cause of the headache. Proper diagnosis is important, so tell your doctor about the severity of the headache, the frequency with which they come and any other information that you think will be helpful in diagnosing the cause of your headaches. Do you get headaches only on certain days or times of the month? Do they come on later in the day or after a particular activity? Are they more common during the week but let up on weekends or days off from work or school? Do certain types of foods or beverage cause them? What else do you notice when you get a headache? Blurry vision, weakness in the arms and legs, a droopy eyelid or facial changes may be a sign of a serious medical condition and you should seek immediate medical care.

Your eye doctor can tell you if your headaches are related to eyestrain and what should be done to correct the problem. Wearing the proper prescription, giving your eyes regular rest breaks and using lubricating drops to keep the eyes properly moisturized all help in relieving headaches caused by eye strain.

The treatment of headaches will be determined by the cause of the headache. Over-the-counter pain relief medicine when taken according to package instructions is the first line

of treatment for tension type headaches. Massage and aroma therapy, relief of stress, lifestyle changes, proper rest and diet all play a role in relieving headache pain.

As common as headaches are, they should never just be ignored, especially if they are a chronic problem or if you take over-the-counter remedies frequently for relief. Aspirin, acetaminophen and ibuprofen, when taken for prolonged periods can have adverse effects on other organ systems of the body such as kidneys and liver. By discussing your headaches and their symptoms with your healthcare provider and your eye doctor, you have a better chance of getting the right treatment for them and you are sure to be healthier and happier.

If you have questions about your eye health e-mail Dr. Barowsky at doctom@tdkj.com and we'll try to answer your questions here at Eye-Q.