

EAR, NOSE AND THROAT ASSOCIATES OF CHESTER COUNTY

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HEADACHES

Headaches are one of the most common complaints that bring patients to seek medical attention. About 45 million Americans suffer from chronic headaches, among which children and teens account for 20 percent. Your primary care provider will help you determine the nature and treatment for your headaches. At times special diagnostic studies may be required or you may be referred to a specialist, including an otolaryngologist (ENT physician), neurologist, etc.

The important thing to remember is that there are numerous reasons for headaches. Sometimes they reflect our bodies telling us we are under too much stress or are not well rested or we may not eating enough healthy foods for our bodies to maintain proper function. Alcohol, heavy fats and salt, and even temperature and humidity changes can result in headaches as well.

Headaches can be a challenging diagnostic problem. As a result it is helpful for a patient to record a headache diary in which you document the location of the headache (that is, one-sided, behind the eyes, radiating to the neck, etc.), the duration, the frequency, triggers such as food, temperature, and alcohol, and the severity of the headaches. Also record any symptoms associated with the headache such as dizziness, fainting, numbness of arms/legs, vision changes, balance problems or difficulty walking during the headache, hearing changes, nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light and/or sound, nasal congestion or drainage, uncontrollable limb movements, jaw pain, headaches while eating, and facial pain or numbness or tingling. Additional important elements of the history include prior head injury, sleeping and dietary habits, stress levels, family history of headaches, a list of prescription and non-prescription medications, and the use of caffeine, tobacco, alcohol and recreational drugs.

As mentioned previously there are a vast number of reasons for headaches. They may be a function of neurological or rheumatological disorders, infectious, vascular, cardiac and ocular problems. ENTACC health care providers, specialists in the fields of Otolaryngology and Head and Neck Surgery, are frequently consulted to evaluate patients for chronic or recurrent headaches.

Among the ENT causes of headaches are acute and chronic sinusitis, allergic rhinitis, migraines, cluster headaches, tension headaches, temporomandibular joint disorder (TMJ), temporal arteritis, trigeminal neuralgia, etc.

As previously noted, a thorough history and a headache diary are extremely useful tools in trying to establish the cause of headaches. Communication between the patient and health care provider is essential. If you are experiencing problems with headaches, please discuss them with your primary health care provider or one of our ENTACC health care providers.