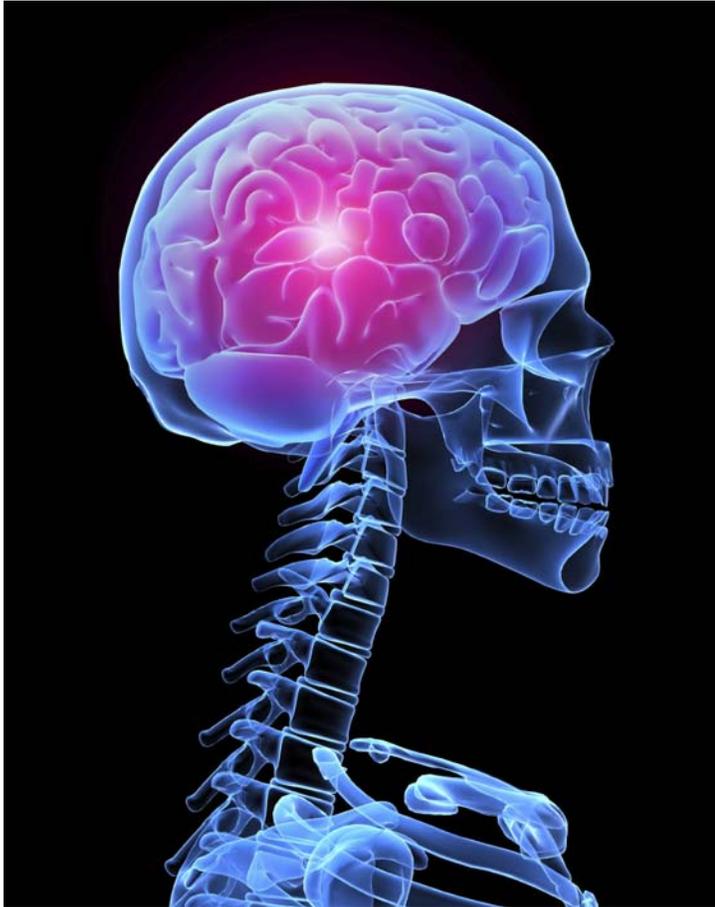




# TENSION HEADACHE GUIDE



## General Anatomy

The most common type of headache, tension headaches are caused by a combination of chemical changes in the brain and overly tightened muscles or muscle spasms in the head, face, neck, and shoulders. The result is pain and pressure, usually in the temples, back of the head, and neck.

Nearly everyone will have tension headaches at some point in their life. For most people, they are intermittent, triggered by stressful events. Others develop chronic tension headaches; tension headaches are considered chronic if they manifest 15 days out of the month for several months in a row. If you experience chronic tension headaches, or if the frequency or symptoms of your headaches are increasing, it is time to visit to your doctor. They may wish to run some simple tests in order to rule out more serious conditions, such as an aneurism or tumor.

## Common Causes

**Stress** is perhaps the most common cause of tension headaches. This stress can be physical or emotional. Physical stress is caused by strain, whether it's eye strain from reading in poor light or with inadequate glasses or muscular from maintaining an awkward position for too long. Emotional stress can come in many, many forms - family/friends, money, work, etc.

**Poor posture** is another frequent trigger of tension headaches. Good posture is the easiest, most natural positing for the body. The human spine has an S-curve shape; this allows it to act like a coil or spring, able to absorb force efficiently while maintaining its strength and stability. Good posture is that which allows the spine to maintain its natural shape. Some things can predispose you to having bad posture (scoliosis, osteoporosis, or a forward-tilting pelvis, for example), and persons with these conditions should have their posture evaluated by a doctor or physical therapist as part of their overall treatment. However, for the vast majority of people, bad posture is simply a bad habit.

**Hunger** puts stress on the body by causing dips in blood sugar levels. These dips can affect brain chemicals, which may lead to tension headaches.

**Sleep deprivation** makes dealing with even the most minute of daily tasks more difficult, and therefore, increases general stress levels.

## Treatment

**Get balanced!** Many times reducing the frequency of tension headaches is as simple as living a healthy lifestyle:

- Eating a nutritious diet on a regular schedule will minimize imbalances in blood sugar.
- Exercising reduces blood pressure, improves circulation, and relaxes the body.
- A full night of restful sleep recharges the body and mind for the next day's challenges.
- Practice good posture to reduce muscle strain.
- Make sure your glasses have the correct prescription to reduce eye strain.

As much as you can, **put stress in its place**. Learn to channel and let go of your stress, whether through exercise, a hobby, therapy, travel, family/friends, church,

## The Next Step

Tension headaches can be debilitating for many people. Physical therapy can help to put you on the path to freedom from tension headaches with stretching, massage, and education about pain management techniques.

You don't have to live with tension headaches. At Idaho Physical Therapy, our caring, professional, experienced therapists can help you achieve the fastest, most complete relief possible. Call us today to book your free assessment - **(208) 463-0022!**

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etc. Or try relaxation activities, such as breathing exercises and yoga.

**A headache diary** can be a useful tool for discovering your headache triggers. Whenever you get a headache, take down the date and time, along with what you are doing, how you are feeling, your last meal, and any medications you're taking. Also make note of the duration and intensity of the headache. As time and your diary progresses, you may begin to notice patterns and be able to identify your headache triggers.

Sudden severe headaches, headaches following a head injury, and headaches accompanied by seizures, confusion, loss of coordination, double vision, and other unusual symptoms should receive emergency medical attention.

