

Monthly Headache Diary

Headache diary cards which record information about the attacks of migraine and other headaches are valuable in assisting the doctor and patients with diagnosis, assessing trigger factors and assessing the effectiveness of treatments.

You have been given this diary card, which needs to be completed as much as possible as this will help the doctor help you.

The diary card (one for each month) is very easy to use.

How to complete the headache diary card

1. The numbers down the left hand side refer to the date (ie a calendar). Indicate the day of the week and the time that the attack started.
2. Record every headache/migraine you get against the appropriate date. Write down under the column whether it was a headache or a migraine that you experienced.
3. Assess the severity and any associated symptoms and record these under the appropriate columns.
4. Record ALL medication you take for the headache, together with the dose and time taken.
5. For women, if applicable, please record in the last column when your period starts and stops. If you take any hormone treatments (eg contraceptive pill, HRT etc) write that in the hormones column.
6. If you experience aura or other visual symptoms please also mark on the diary and describe in more detail on the reverse of the card. Please feel free to record on the diary card (or additional sheets) any other information that may be relevant to your migraine or headaches (eg additional triggers such as stress, long journey, missed meals, neck tension etc).

Self Help for Headaches

It is horrible having headaches but there is a lot that you can do to help yourself. The following tips are all based on medical evidence and experience. What works for one person, doesn't work for another so be flexible in your approach and willing to try different strategies. **The key is learning to control your headaches so that you control them**, rather than the other way around! It goes without saying that a healthy diet, regular exercise and enough sleep are essential starting points!

Keep a headache diary

This is very important to help to identify triggers (e.g. diet, stress etc) and to assess the benefit of interventions. It also helps keep track on painkiller and medication usage. They are also easily available as apps for your phone.

Monitor your drug usage

Medication overuse headache is very common and can easily sneak up on you. By definition, you have this once you are using simple pain killers (such as paracetamol and ibuprofen) more than 15 days a month, and 'triptans' or stronger painkillers (e.g. containing codeine) more than 10 days a month. *Do not exceed these limits and if you have already, speak to your GP about this.* Good news, once you have cut down your headaches will get a lot better!

Do muscular relaxation exercises

This takes some time and commitment but is highly effective. There is increasing evidence that in many people headaches are triggered from muscular 'trigger' points around the base of the skull and relaxation exercises work.

Stress reduction

Stress is a major contributory factor to headaches and always makes everything worse.

Learning to control and manage your stress is crucial to better headache management. This means taking control of your work and home life so that you can manage your time better, but also making the time to effectively relax. The latter is difficult; one of the great ironies of relaxation, is it is something you have to work at! Mindfulness-based stress reduction is the most effective way to do this.

Tooth Grinding

If you also have jaw pain you may be a nocturnal 'tooth-grinder'. This causes a common problem called bruxism and can also trigger tension headaches and migraines. It is caused by stress, but also can be a side-effect of some medications like antidepressants. Seeing your dentist is worthwhile for consideration of a splint (which are unfortunately not available on the NHS).

Posture

It is thought that a lot of headaches may be 'cervicogenic', originating from pinched nerves at the back of the neck. This is often caused by poor posture, as modern life leads to us being slumped over keyboards and digital devices. If this is you, work hard on your posture to keep your neck and back as straight as possible (imagine a plumb line attached to the crown of your skull, which keeps pulling you gently upwards to straighten out your neck and back) and get up from the computer at frequent intervals to stretch your neck.

Vitamins and minerals

A healthy diet and watching alcohol and caffeine consumption, is the most important thing but there is also some evidence to support vitamin supplements. NICE recommend Vitamin B2 (riboflavin) as a daily supplement at a dose of 400mg daily. This is not available on prescription, but is easily available from pharmacies. Be warned it makes your pee go very yellow!

Acupuncture

There is high quality scientific evidence that so-called medical acupuncture (needling of muscular trigger points around the base of the skull) by physiotherapists or doctors trained in this technique is highly effective. Although recommended by NICE, unfortunately it is not generally available on the NHS. If you can afford it however, it is worth trying as it can be highly effective.

For more information on self-help, please visit the following websites:

NHS information on Migraine:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Migraine/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

The Migraine Trust:

<https://www.migrainetrust.org/>