



# Headache Hygiene



## START IMPROVING YOUR CHILD'S HEADACHES TODAY

**Headache** is one of the most common symptoms reported by patients and frequently this begins in childhood. Nearly 60% of children report having had headaches and this increased to 90% by the time they reach age 18 years. Some children even experience chronic headaches in which they have headache more than 15 days per month.

Children can experience severe headaches like migraine headaches. Half of all migraine sufferers will experience their first attack before age 12.

Headaches can significantly impact a child's life, interfering with their ability to participate in school and other activities.

Doctors use many tools to treat headaches, but frequently the first thing your doctor may do to help your child's

headache is to review your child's daily habits and patterns and improve their headache hygiene. Things such as skipping meals and/or not drinking enough water each day are common causes of headaches and can make children who experience migraines have headaches more often.

Headache hygiene is the practice of creating an environment that can help to reduce the frequency, intensity, and severity of headaches and potentially lessen the need for medications.

Parents and caregivers play a very important and very active role in improving children's headaches by helping them to create healthy habits and practice good headache hygiene. Headache hygiene is the first step in the battle against headaches! You can get started today with these tips!

# HEALTHY TIPS FOR HEADACHE

## **Avoid skipping meals and review dietary habits**

- Fasting is one of the most common causes of headaches. It is important that children not skip any meals, but many children report skipping meals at school when they are not in the presence of their parents. Check in with your child or child's teacher specifically to ensure that they are eating the meals at school. Consider sending food to school if there is a meal on the school menu that your child may not eat.
- Breakfast is a very important meal! Plan time in the morning for your child to eat breakfast if they are not eating breakfast at school. It is also helpful to make sure that their breakfast includes protein (eggs, Greek yogurt, peanut butter, etc.).
- Help your child to choose healthy snacks like fruits and vegetables, instead of junk food.

## **Increase your child's water intake and eliminate caffeinated beverages**

- Children should drink plenty of water! Encourage water intake over juices, sodas and sports drinks.
- Children should drink at least 8 glasses of water per day (and even higher in teenage boys who should drink 10!). Have your child drink water all throughout the day, starting in the morning before school. If your child's school allows, send a water bottle to school with them to encourage water drinking throughout the day.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under the age of 12 have NO caffeinated beverages. Elimination of caffeine, though, can help even older children with headaches. We recommend that caffeinated beverages

be consumed no more than once per week, and that it not replace consumption of water.

- It is HOT for much of the year in Louisiana! When participating in sports or other active play in the heat, we recommend that children consume 4 ounce of water (4 big gulps!) every 20 minutes to stay hydrated.

## **Practice good sleep hygiene**

- The quality of sleep, the amount of sleep, and having a consistent sleep schedule are all important in the fight against headaches!
- Children between the ages of 6-12 should sleep 9-12 hours per night, and teenagers should sleep 8-10 hours.
- Develop a strict sleep schedule that children can follow all nights of the week including the weekend. Children should go to bed at the same time each night and wake at the same time each morning. Avoid staying up late and sleeping in on weekends!
- Eliminate TVs and radios from your child's room and do not allow older children to sleep with their cell phones. These devices can provide distraction and delay sleep for many children.
- Notify your child's doctor if they experience snoring at night. Children who snore during sleep can experience headaches.

## **Exercise! Exercise! Exercise!**

- Regular exercise can help many medical conditions including headache and also fights stress.
- We recommend 30 minutes of aerobic exercise (or active play for younger children) 5 days per week.

## **Children can be stressed too!**

- Children can have stressors just like adults! Common sources of stress for kids include school, problems with friends, bullying, peer pressure, and extracurricular activities. If your family is going through a difficult time, for example a recent loss of a loved one, a move to a new home, or a parental separation, your child may also feel stressed.
- If your child is complaining of frequent headaches, check in with your child to see if there are any sources of stress or concern.
- As children get older, their schedules can get quite full! Make sure there is time for your child to unwind and relax.
- Anxiety and depression can also be associated with higher occurrence of headaches. If you have any concern that your child may have signs of anxiety or depression, make sure to discuss your concerns with your child's primary care provider.

## **Be aware of how often you are giving medication for headaches**

- Unfortunately the medications we use to help with head pain, when taken too often, may actually cause patients to experience headaches more often.
- If you are using over the counter or even medicine prescribed by your child's physician to treat their headaches, try to treat only 2 – 3 headaches per week with medications.
- Occasionally, children are prescribed medication or vitamins by their doctor to take every day whether or not they have head pain. These medications are ok to take daily as prescribed. Only the medications used to treat head pain at onset must be limited.

**Locations: Main Campus, Metairie Center and Northshore Center**  
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