

Headaches in Post COVID-19 Recovery

Post-COVID-19

Interdisciplinary Clinical Care Network

Recovery | Care | Research | Education

► Patients commonly report headaches as a symptom following COVID-19. There are many types, with different symptoms and locations. Most headaches are not dangerous nor cause damage to the brain.

There are medication and non-medication options that often help.



Types of Headache

Headaches are usually classified based on their symptoms and location, such as either migraine or tension headache. The type of headache determines the treatments that are usually effective.

What Triggers Your Headaches?

Common headache triggers include dehydration, stress, neck pain, and/or overstimulation. Poor sleep can also make headaches worse.

Some triggers (e.g., stress) are very hard to avoid. If you are experiencing high levels of triggers such as stress or anxiety, even after trying self-management strategies, you may need further guidance from your family doctor.



Figuring out a solution that works for you often takes time and practice.

How You Can Help Your Headaches

Identifying your headache triggers and then acting early using some of the following strategies can help reduce the how often and how badly you get headaches. Don't wait for your headaches to get bad!

Here are some strategies that you can use to help your headaches:

1. Apply a hot or cold pack to your head or neck.
2. Tie a piece of cloth fairly tightly around your head.
3. Practice breathing exercises. For more information, visit HealthLink BC: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/illnesses-conditions/rehabilitation-and-exercise/stress-management-breathing-exercises-relaxation>.
4. Get regular, safe amounts of physical exercise that don't flare your symptoms. For more information visit: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/physical-activity>.
5. Practise visualization or other mindfulness activity. For more information visit: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/mindfulness-based-stress-reduction>.
6. Take a 'brain break'.
7. Go for a walk, sit or rest in a quiet place.
8. Get outside for fresh air.
9. Self-massage your head and/or stretch your neck and shoulders muscles.
10. Eat regular meals.
11. Drink plenty of water.
12. Practise good sleep hygiene. For more information visit: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/illnesses-conditions/fatigue-and-sleep/sleep-problems-age-12-and-older>.



Medications Your Family Doctor May Recommend

Medications for headache fall into two main categories. One category of medications stops a headache once it has started (also called “rescue medications”) and the other category of medications prevent headaches from starting (preventative medications).

Taking Action!

Headaches following COVID-19 usually improve with time.

If your headaches are not improving with the strategies outlined in this handout, speak to your family doctor. They may review your medications, refer you to a specialist, or explore other treatment options with you.

What to Watch For

- Worsening headaches
- Headaches that often wake you from sleeping
- Fevers associated with worsening headaches
- Numbness/weakness/speech/visual problems associated with headaches

If you experience any of these symptoms you should seek medical care immediately.



Remember that practicing diligent pacing strategies and staying within your energy envelope is an effective way of managing headaches.

For more information on how to support your understanding and management of symptoms as you recover from COVID-19, please visit www.phsa.ca/health-info/post-covid-19-care-recovery



SharedCare
Partners for Patients



Provincial Health
Services Authority



First Nations Health Authority
health through wellness

