HEADACHES AND MIGRAINES

There are many different types of headaches, but the common factor is they all cause pain. There are tension headaches (both episodic and chronic), cluster headaches, and sinus headaches also may cause other symptoms such as nausea and vomiting. Whichever type of headache you suffer from, the pain can take you away from your everyday activities and bring about lack of enjoyment in your life.

**Tension Headaches** can appear upon awakening, can cause difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep, and may present with symptoms of chronic fatigue, irritability, disturbed concentration, mild sensitivity to light or noise, and general muscle aching. Episodic tension headaches occur less than 15 days per month while chronic tension headaches occur more than 15 days per month.

**Cluster Headaches** are intense one-sided pain described as throbbing or constant. Pain is located in the eye region and lasts a short time but can last from 15 minutes to as long as three hours. These headaches may come and go throughout the day (most sufferers get one to three headaches per day during a cluster period). Headaches occur very regularly, generally at the same time each day, and they often awaken the person at the same time during the night.

**Sinus Headache** symptoms include deep and constant pain in the cheekbones, forehead, or bridge of the nose. The pain usually intensifies with sudden head movement or straining and usually occurs with other sinus symptoms (drainage, ear pain, and fever).

**Migraines** are painful headaches often accompanied by nausea, vomiting, and sensitivity to light. A migraine episode can change over hours or even days. Migraines tend to progress through several stages with symptoms occurring in various combinations: moderate to severe pain that can affect the whole head or change from one side of the head to the other; sensitivity to light, noise, or odors; blurred vision; nausea or vomiting, stomach upset or abdominal pain; loss of appetite; sensations of being very warm or cold; paleness; fatigue; dizziness; and fever.

**Headache Triggers May Include:**

- **Stress (Family/Work)** – ANYTHING that boosts your stress level
- **Weather Changes** – hot or cold
- **Strong Scents** – may include paint, perfume, and certain types of flowers
- **Exercise** (“jogger’s” headache and “sex” headaches) - Migraine sufferers at greater risk for these types of headaches.
- **Poor Posture** – slouching, cradling your phone between your ear and neck (more tension headache sufferers), and poor work station setup
- **Foods** - Cheese (Swiss, parmesan, cheddar, blue cheese) - contains tryamine (the culprit for headaches) Cold Cuts – contain tyramine and nitrates (food additives)
- **Red Wine** – alcohol trigger as well as tyramine
- **Skipping Meals** – “hunger” headaches (low blood sugar)
• **Smoking/Second-hand Smoke** – affects more cluster headache sufferers

• **Dehydration**

• **Caffeine Overload/Caffeine Withdrawal**

• **Hormonal Changes in Women**

In order to receive proper treatment, a correct diagnosis of your headaches or migraines is necessary. Your doctor will first take a headache history. Some people prefer to keep a headache diary to identify triggers and patterns. Any studies or tests previously done should be brought to the office visit for review.

After completing the headache history, a complete physical and neurological exam looking for signs and symptoms of an illness that may be causing the headaches will be performed. An evaluation by a psychologist may be done to identify stress factors triggering your headaches.

Additional tests may be necessary to look for other medical conditions that may be causing your headaches or migraines. However, most of these laboratory tests are not helpful in diagnosing migraine, cluster, or tension headaches. These additional tests might include blood chemistry and urinalysis, CT scan, MRI, EEG, sinus x-ray, eye exam, or a spinal tap.

You can find relief in medications, alternative treatments, and by learning ways to reduce stress and relax. Helpful tips are….

• **Identify Own Triggers** – keep a headache diary

• **Manage Stress** – massage, meditation, yoga

• **Moderate Exercise** – walking fights tension headaches

• **Eat Regular Meals** – Eat meals and protein with complex carbohydrate snacks. Drink plenty of fluids to keep well hydrated.

• **Physical Therapy** – Exercise and education help people with tension headaches.

• **Medication** – OTC acetaminophen, aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen – avoid overuse

• **Prescription Medication** – ordered by your doctor (frequent and severe headaches)

Visit your doctor if you notice new triggers or changes in your headache symptoms or patterns. Seek emergency care if you experience vision changes, movement problems, confusion, seizure, fever, or a stiff neck.

Remember, there are organizations and support groups available in your community – *You are not alone!*

**Visit the Lehigh County intranet site to schedule your appointment at the Wellness Centre.**