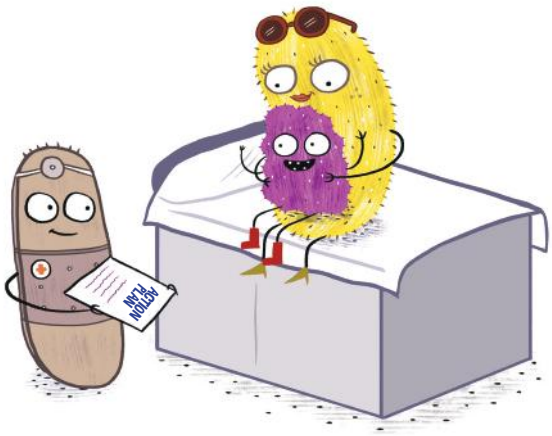
HEADACHE PREVENTION & RESCUE STRATEGY OVERVIEW



What you and your provider need to know to put together a plan to prevent headaches AND create a solid rescue plan for when the pain starts.

The research is clear that there are many things that you can do that can improve headaches once they start and prevent them from taking hold. We all do better and increase our chances of success when we have a good plan of action. But before we can make that plan, we need to understand what should go into it. This overview breaks down the options.

After you check them out, you and your provider can decide which strategies are most important for you right now. Everyone is different, so it's important to think about what is best for you. This is often a question of motivation ("what do I feel I want to and can do?") and impact ("what is going to make the biggest difference?").

To create the best plan possible, it's very helpful to understand the details of your own headache experience. We encourage you to use the **Headache Symptom Checklist**, and the **Headache Diary** to track your symptoms. When you truly understand symptoms and patterns, it makes it easier to find the ways to help yourself feel better.

Because headaches often run in families, getting information about what has worked for family members can often give some clues about what can work for you too. The Headache History worksheet can give you some good insight.

Use all this info to help you and doc work together to fill out both your **Headache Prevention Action Plan** and your **Headache Rescue Action Plan**.

PREVENT:

Things you can incorporate into your daily life that can help stop the headache before it starts

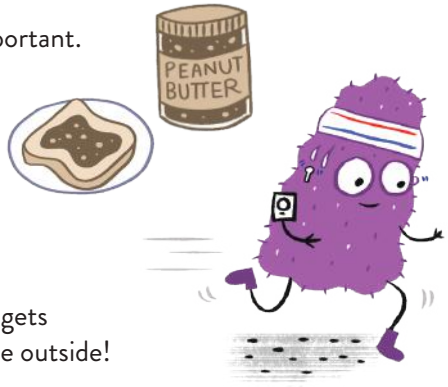
Drink

- Aim for 64 ounces of water each day.
  If you can't get that much, see how close you can get!

Eat

- Don't go too long without eating. Keeping your body fueled and regulated is important. This means 3 meals a day and some snacks.
- It's especially important to eat breakfast each day. Include some protein so your blood sugar is more steady (ups and downs can be a headache trigger).

  Some ideas: a hard-boiled egg, a protein bar or shake, nuts, and Greek yogurt.



Move

- Get 30 minutes of exercise each day. Find something you think is fun, and that gets your heart rate up/makes you a little short of breath. It's great if you can exercise outside!

  Examples: walking the dog, playing basketball, dancing to music, and walking with a friend.

Have Fun

- Find a way to do something fun each day. It lowers stress and creates all kinds of good neurochemicals in your body that prevent and reduce pain.

Relax

- Figure out what makes you feel less stressed, and make it part of your daily routine. This can be things like listening to music, drawing, talking with a friend, doing a meditation, taking some slow deep breaths, or spending time outside. ImaginAction is a great website to practice self regulation strategies and is free to use. It can be helpful to build these activities into your daily routine so you remember to do it each day. ***ImaginAction:***

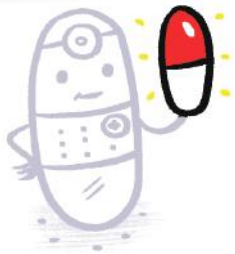
Sleep

- Aim for 8-10 hours of sleep each night. When does that mean that you need to go to bed each night?
- Create a relaxing bedtime routine. Try to do this for the hour before bed each night. Examples can be taking a shower or bath, listening to music, drawing, doing a meditation on an app, doing some yoga or stretching, or reading for pleasure. Write it down.
- Go to bed within an hour of the same time each night and wake up within an hour of the same time each morning, even on weekends (we know you don't want to hear it but it is actually really important)!
- Limit naps. No napping is ideal, but if you do nap, keep it to 30 minutes or so.

What can I do to improve sleep?

Check out this handout on sleep that has even more great information:

Meds and supplements



- Some medications are designed to prevent headaches. Check with your doctor about if this may be a good choice for you.
- Remember that some of these types of medications and supplements can take a long time to work (we are talking many weeks). Find out from your doctor how long it should take you to see a difference before you stop taking it.

Other important stuff

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and pain management

- Acupuncture is a proven way to prevent and manage headaches. It can take a while to be effective, so you need to stick with it for a while.
- Cognitive behavioral therapy with a mental health provider can be a key part of managing chronic pain.

Learn more in this handout:

- Neuromodulation devices can also help to manage and prevent headaches by calming or retraining the nerves. These devices can be used each day to help your nerves be less sensitive and cause less headaches. Some of the devices can also be used for "rescue" or stopping the headache after it has started.

Check out this article from the American Migraine Foundation to explore options:

- You may have heard about other interventions for migraines like Botox injections or a new class of medications call CGRP inhibitors. We don't want to skip over them as a strategy because they are out there in the world, but they are typically only used after other treatments haven't worked. This is typically done when a kid or teen has tried multiple other headache medicines for prevention (usually at least 2 preventive medicines for at least 3 months each) and they aren't working. ***These handouts can make those injections easier:***

Preparing for your headache procedure:

There are a also few things that you should know:

- These interventions always involve a medical provider that specializes in headaches and is likely part of a headache or pain clinic.
- Both Botox injections and CGRP inhibitors are technically "off-label" for kids. This means that they aren't FDA-approved for people under age 18 and that there is more limited research information on kids than adults. Are they still used for kids and teens under 18? Sometimes! That's why it is so important to have a specialist involved. (To be fair, there are a lot of medications out there that are commonly used "off label" for kids.)
- The CGRP medications are typically only prescribed for pediatric patients who have "chronic migraine", meaning they have at least 15 headache days per month, with at least 8 of those headache days meeting criteria for migraine.

How to Apply Numbing Cream Before Common Headache Procedures:

RESCUE:

What to do after the headache starts:

- **ACT FAST**: when it comes to managing migraine attacks, earlier is better. Do not wait to treat...it makes it harder. It's important to have your rescue stuff with you wherever you are. Remember, the faster that you do your rescue plan, the better it will work!
- **Medication:** it's usually best to take medications as soon as you feel a headache coming on. Work with your doctor to create a specific game plan for that below.
- **Neuromodulation:** Consider calming the nerves with one of these devices.
- **Take a time out:** If possible, take a good but limited break: it's often helpful to lie down in a dark quiet room for 30 minutes if you're able to. If you're at home you might be able to rest for a little longer. Just try to not to throw off your schedule too much or cause yourself extra stress. We want you to still be able to sleep at night!
- **Self regulation:** calm your body and your mind with self-regulation strategies like breathing exercises, listening to audio books, meditation apps, or exploring ImaginAction.

TRACK!

Use the headache diary to collect data about how things are changing.

Figuring out what is best for you is a lot easier when we can track.

Meg Foundation
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