



NATIONAL HEADACHE FOUNDATION

formerly National Migraine Foundation

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STRESS

Events causing emotional stress can trigger a migraine headache. It is one of the most common precipitating factors of migraine. Migraine sufferers are thought to be highly responsive emotionally, reacting quickly and easily to stress. In times of emotional stress, certain chemicals are released that provoke the vascular changes that cause a migraine headache. The attacks become more frequent in periods of increased stress. Factors related to stress include anxiety, worry, shock, depression, excitement, and mental fatigue. Repressed emotions can also precipitate migraine headaches, and the muscle tension often brought on by stress situations can add to the severity of the headache. After a stressful period there may be a letdown which can, in itself, trigger a migraine headache. The arteries may be constricted by prolonged stress, and when the individual is finally able to relax, the blood vessels may dilate, causing the headache. This may be one reason for weekend headaches. Attacks occurring during a relaxation period, after stress, can often be helped by modifying the stressful periods and keeping busier during leisure times.

Stress is an important factor in muscle contraction or tension headache. There are two types of tension (muscle contraction) headache - episodic and chronic. Episodic can be related to specific instances of increased worry, concern, or stress and usually is helped by over-the-counter analgesics. Chronic and repeated stress will cause daily or almost daily tension headache. The headache is generalized, ("hat-band" distribution), and often accompanied by a sleep disturbance. Help is provided by lowering stress, psychotherapy, biofeedback, behavioral modification, and the use of antidepressant drugs under the watchful eye of a physician.