CPNI
Cyprus Paediatric Neurology Institute
Παιδονευρολογικό Ινστιτούτο Κύπρου

LEAFLET FOR PARENTS AND PATIENTS

Tension-type headache in children and young people

Tension-type headache is the most common kind of headache in children and teenagers. It is usually mild to moderate and is not a sign of anything serious. Simple changes to daily routine often help a great deal.

What does it feel like?

- A dull, pressing or tight feeling, like a band around the head
- Usually on both sides of the head, the forehead or the back of the head and neck
- Mild to moderate: most children can carry on with their day
- It does not usually get worse with walking or climbing stairs
- There is no vomiting, although light or noise may be a little uncomfortable
- It can last from 30 minutes to several days

What can make it more likely?

- Stress or worry, for example about school, friendships or exams
- Not enough sleep, or going to bed late
- Missing meals or not drinking enough water
- Long periods on screens or reading without breaks
- Poor posture and tight neck and shoulder muscles
- Eyesight problems: it is worth having your child's eyes checked
- Low mood or anxiety

What helps during a headache

- ✓ Rest, a drink of water and something to eat
- ✓ Fresh air, a warm shower or gentle neck and shoulder stretches
- ✓ Relaxation or slow breathing exercises
- ✓ If needed, ibuprofen or paracetamol at the dose on the packet for your child's age or weight
- ✓ Do not give aspirin to children under 16

Avoid using pain relief too often

Taking pain relief on more than 2 to 3 days a week can cause more headaches, known as medication-overuse headache. If your child needs pain relief this often, please see us so we can make a better plan.

Helping to prevent headaches

- ✓ Keep regular sleep, with the same bedtime and wake-up time every day
- ✓ Eat regular meals, starting with breakfast
- ✓ Drink water regularly through the day, including at school
- ✓ Be active every day and spend time outdoors
- ✓ Take regular breaks from screens and homework; switch screens off at least an hour before bed
- ✓ Talk with your child about worries, and let the school know if headaches affect learning
- ✓ If headaches are frequent, psychological support or relaxation training can help, and occasionally a preventive medicine is used

When to get urgent help

Call 112 or go to the nearest Emergency Department straight away if your child has a headache with any of the following:

- A sudden, very severe headache, the worst they have ever had
- Fever with a stiff neck, a rash that does not fade when pressed, or unusual drowsiness
- A headache after a head injury
- Weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, slurred speech or confusion
- Double vision, loss of vision, or new unsteadiness when walking
- A seizure (fit)
- Headaches that wake them from sleep, or come with vomiting in the early morning
- Headaches that get steadily worse over days or weeks, or are worse when coughing, straining or lying down

Keep a headache diary

Writing down each headache helps us find patterns and triggers. Please bring the diary to your appointment.

Date and time	How bad (0–10)	How long	What helped	Possible trigger

Contact CPNI

If headaches are happening often, are getting worse, or are affecting school or sleep, please call our office on +357 22 476 627 to book an appointment, or email cpni2007@gmail.com.

More leaflets and information: www.cpni.com.cy

This leaflet gives general information. It does not replace advice from your child's doctor.

Reviewed by Dr Paola Nicolaides, Consultant Paediatric Neurologist, November 2026.

© Cyprus Paediatric Neurology Institute