Non-migraine headaches

What causes headaches?

Most people who suffer from regular headaches have either migraine or tension headaches.

If you have been diagnosed with a migraine headache then please see the **Migraine Patient Factsheet**.

Occasionally, headaches can be caused by diseases involving the teeth, sinuses or eyes. In rare cases, headaches can be caused by diseases affecting the brain - including infections, tumours and bleeding.

Headaches can also occur during or after sexual activity.

General illness can cause headaches particularly where intake of food or fluids is not enough to meet the body's needs.

What are tension headaches?

This is the most common type of headache, but the link with stress is not clear.

A tension headache is usually less severe than a migraine, and affects both sides of the head. It feels like a tight band or a weight pressing down on your head. Tension headaches may come and go over days or weeks.

When should I see my doctor?

When you have a sudden onset headache which is severe then you should see you doctor immediately or go to the Emergency Department, particularly if this occurred during exercise.

If you are having headaches more than twice a week, it is worth seeing your doctor. A consultation may help with diagnosis and to find out if there are any triggers you notice that bring on your headaches or migraine.

You should see your doctor urgently if you have a headache together with slurred speech, numbness or dizziness, blackouts or persistent vomiting.

You should also see your doctor if you start having frequent headaches when you are over the age of 50, or if your headaches are getting worse and will not go away.

Will I need any tests?

Often the cause of your headache will be clear to your doctor from your description and a simple examination.

You may need tests to rule out other illnesses that can cause headaches such as blood tests or scans if your history is concerning.

What treatments are available?

For tension headaches, treatment with simple pain killers such as **ibuprofen** and **paracetamol**, may be all that is needed. These pain killers can all be bought from a pharmacy and detailed use is described in the **Pain Management Patient Factsheet**.

Where there is a cause found then treatment of that should reduce the headache along with simple pain killers.