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How to

Stop Headaches for Good

Put an end to your tension-headache pain by making these simple lifestyle changes.

BY ROBERT IVKER, D.O., AND TODD NELSON, N.D.

WE ALL EXPERIENCE STRESS. But some of us respond in ways that bring on a tension headache. We tense the muscles in our head and neck, tightening our shoulders and clenching our jaws, and we take shallow breaths, depriving our bodies of oxygen.

Instead of suffering, you can take control of your tension headaches. We've developed the following holistic strategies during our combined 50 years of treating headache patients. Use the quick fixes listed under "For Now" on page 66 to find fast relief. You could stop here, masking your headache pain whenever it occurs. But we urge you to follow our other recommendations, which address the causes of your headaches and teach you how to prevent future ones.

Following all our suggestions will require you to make some permanent, but easy, changes to your lifestyle. Incorporate no more than two new strategies each week. The more gradual the process, the more likely it is that you'll stay with it and get rid of your headaches for good.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KELLER AND KELLER

STYLING: DEBRA COLARDO. HAIR AND MAKEUP: AUDREY BERMAN



**Press for Instant
Headache Relief**

- 1** Find the sore points on your neck.
- 2** Press these points firmly with 2 fingers for 8 to 10 seconds.
- 3** Ease the pressure and massage the area.

air quality is to place a negative-ion generator in the room where you spend the most time, which is probably your bedroom. Negative ions, air molecules that have excess electrons, freshen the air by removing unhealthy particles.

Another way to clean your indoor air is to buy a freestanding HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filter or an ULPA (ultra-low penetrating air) filter. If you have furnace ducts, you should clean them once a year. Also invest in an effective furnace filter like the pleated filters called Filtrate made by 3M.

Adding plants to your home and office may filter indoor pollution from the air. The Plants for Clean Air Council in Davidsonville, Md., recommends a minimum of two plants per 100 square feet of floor space. The most effective air-filtering plants include aloe vera, areca palms, Boston ferns, chrysanthemums, dwarf date palms, English ivy, ficus, philoden-

dron, pothos, spider plants, and striped dracaena.

Opening your windows for at least 15 minutes a day also diminishes indoor air pollution. But if you live in a highly polluted city, don't open them.

STAY HYDRATED. Keeping your muscles hydrated decreases your potential for the muscle spasms that can cause tension headaches. Hydration also helps your bloodstream absorb oxygen. To maximize your intake of water, you should keep the humidity in your house between 35 and 55 percent; if your indoor air is dry (a sign of this is static electricity), buy a warm-mist humidifier. And drink eight to ten 8-ounce glasses of water, bottled or filtered, a day.

Dry, inflamed mucous membranes can aggravate tension headaches. To clean your nasal passages, use a device called a neti pot or the smaller plastic version called SinuCleanse; both are sold at most natural food

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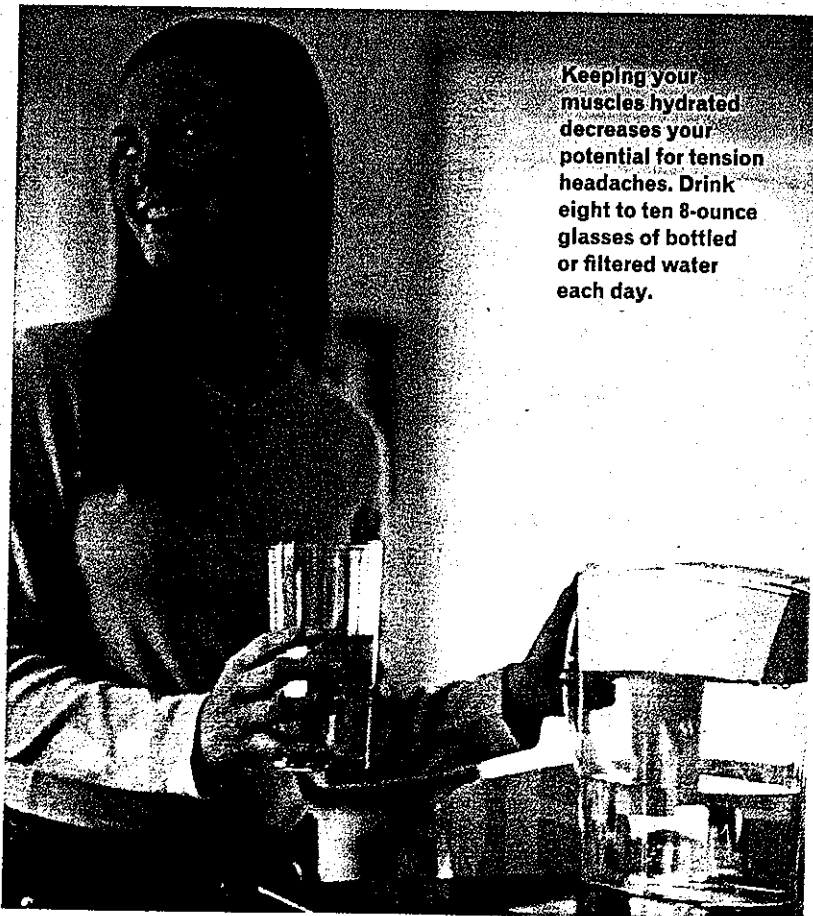
A Novelist Gets Rid of Her Deadline Headaches

FOUR YEARS AGO, MARGARET Coel, 64, a Boulder, Colo., mystery novelist, was closing in on the deadline for her third book when she began experiencing excruciating headaches that wouldn't let up.

A CAT scan and an evaluation by her doctor ruled out a brain tumor, cluster headaches, and migraines. The final diagnosis: tension headaches. Conventional medical advice didn't help, so she went to see local naturopath Todd Nelson, N.D., for a more holistic approach.

First Nelson had Coel take the Chinese herbal formula Hepataplex (*long dan xie gan tang*), which relieved her headaches immediately. But she wanted to ward off future headaches. Coel already walked several miles a day, but Nelson asked her to walk faster and longer. He also instructed her to eat more fish, more fruits and vegetables, and fewer bad fats. Nelson told her to take magnesium glycinate and essential fatty acids to reduce inflammation, DHEA to support her adrenal glands, and phosphatidylserine to calm her nervous system. His final recommendation, which Coel considered the toughest, was to relax and listen to music for 15 minutes a day.

Within a few weeks, Coel no longer needed Hepataplex, and within three months she was headache-free. Coel says she'll be on the program for the rest of her life. But that's okay with her. "I don't want to go back to having headaches." —Clare Horn



Keeping your muscles hydrated decreases your potential for tension headaches. Drink eight to ten 8-ounce glasses of bottled or filtered water each day.

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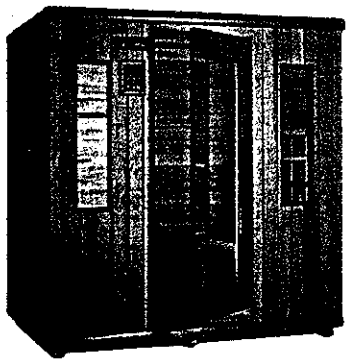
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How to Stop Headaches for Good

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stores. Saltwater nasal sprays also help thin mucus. You can buy a commercial product or make your own by mixing ½ teaspoon of noniodized table salt, a pinch of baking soda, and 8 ounces of lukewarm bottled water. Pour the mixture into a small spray bottle and spray into each nostril while closing off the other and simultaneously inhaling. Do this as often as you need to.

Tweak Your Eating Habits

A nutritious diet helps fortify your body so it's not as vulnerable to the stress that can cause tension headaches. Eat a lot of organic fruits and vegetables and whole grains, avoid unhealthy trans fats (look for "hydrogenated oils" on labels), and skip alcohol, caffeine, and salt, which can sap nutrients from your body. In addition to eating more nutritious foods, follow these three strategies:

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SUPPLEMENTS. If you don't eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, take a daily multivitamin and multimineral. You should also get more essential fatty acids, which reduce inflammation, thereby relieving the muscle soreness that contributes to tension headaches. We recommend that patients take 600 mg of EPA and 400 mg of DHA essential fatty acids four times a day for 12 weeks and three times a day after that. The mineral magnesium, which relaxes your muscles, also prevents tension headaches in many patients. Take 500 mg a day of magnesium glycinate, the form that is more well-absorbed by your muscles.

EAT MINDFULLY. Use eating as an excuse to slow down. Don't read or watch TV. Concentrate on chewing. Taste each bite of food. Eat sitting at a table, not in the car or on your couch. Spend about 30 minutes eating each meal; eating on the run can exacerbate the anxiety that leads to tension headaches.

FERRET OUT FOOD ALLERGIES. Food allergies frequently aggravate tension headaches. To find out which foods, if any, you're allergic to, eliminate the fol-



The scent of green apples has been linked to headache relief.

lowing from your diet for one month: cheese, citrus fruits, corn, cultured dairy products, fish, legumes, meat, rye, sugar, and wheat (including flour-based foods like bread and pasta). Then reintroduce them one at a time every three to five days. Note if any food triggers a tension headache. If it does, take it out of your diet for good. If it doesn't, add it back in on a rotational basis, eating it once every three to five days until your body gets used to it again.

Address Your Stress

You can prevent tension headaches by decreasing your anxiety level. This can be done quickly with regular exercise and relaxation techniques and with the help of holistic health practitioners. Exercise is a great stress reliever. And working out your stress will help you sleep more soundly, which also alleviates tension.

WORK UP A SWEAT. In our clinical practice, we've found that regular aerobic exercise diminishes the frequency and intensity of tension headaches. Bike, jog, swim, or walk briskly at least five days a week. Maintain your target heart rate—the point at which you find it difficult to converse—for 20 to 30 minutes.

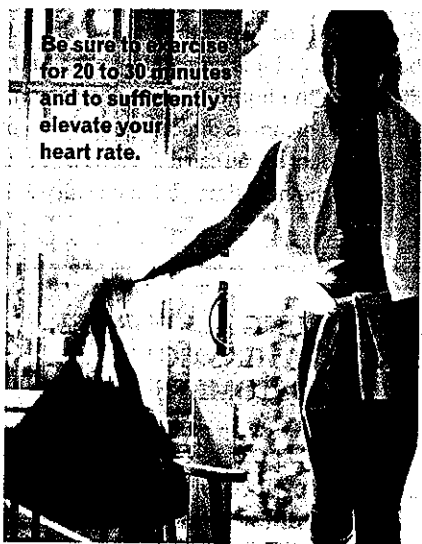
RELAX. Learning to shift your focus to something totally different from what you're concentrating on, even for 30 seconds every hour, will help you work and sleep better. While at work, switch gears and visit your favorite website, or stand and stretch. To make relaxation a regular part of your life, engage in any activity that interests you, like reading, garden-

m

ing, or singing, for two or three evenings a week.

Deep relaxation techniques like meditation and biofeedback can help you learn healthy ways to respond to stress. For an explanation of biofeedback, see "I Tried Biofeedback," page 32. For tips on how to meditate, pick up the audio program *Meditation for Optimum Health* (Sounds True, 2001).

GET WORKED OVER. The World Health Organization considers acupuncture an effective treatment for acute and chronic tension headaches because it releases energy blockages that can cause tension. We've found that acupuncture works quickly or not at all. If you get relief in your first visit, try seeing an acupuncturist weekly for three to five weeks. To find one in your area, contact the American



Association of Oriental Medicine (888-500-7999; www.aaom.org).

Craniosacral therapists use their hands to gently manipulate your head and sacrum (the point in your lower back where your pelvis and spinal column meet) to balance the cerebrospinal fluid that surrounds them. These manipulations correct nervous system blockages and ease the musculoskeletal tension that can cause or worsen headaches. To find a craniosacral therapist in your area, contact the Upledger Institute (800-233-5880; www.upledger.com).

Robert Ivker, D.O., is a holistic physician in Littleton, Colo. **Todd Nelson, N.D.**, is a naturopath in Denver, Colo.

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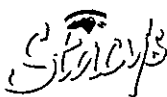
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Natural Health coordinated with Food For Free Committee Inc., a Cambridge, MA organization that has been providing hunger relief since 1981. To contact them, call 617-868-2900, or to find a hunger relief organization in your area, check out: www.secondharvest.com

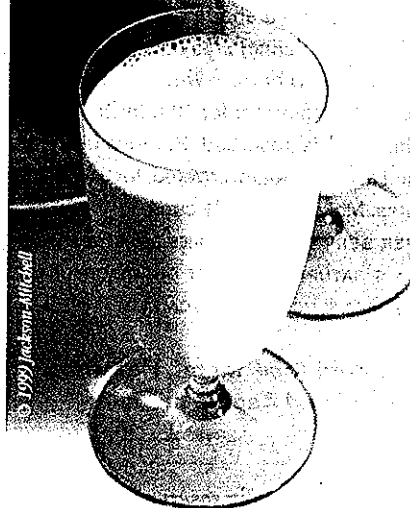
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