

Cluster Headache

What is a cluster headache?

A cluster headache is a rare type of headache that causes pain on one side of the head, often around the eye. These headaches could happen every other day or as often as eight times in a single day. The pain can last from 15 minutes to three hours, and it often comes back around the same time each day.

Are there any other symptoms?

You may notice other changes to your face on the same side as the headache. These include eye watering and redness, stuffy or runny nose, or swelling of the eyelid, forehead, or face. You may have a droopy eyelid or changes in the size of the pupil. You may feel agitated or restless during an attack.

Who gets it?

Cluster headache is more common in men than in women. It usually starts between 20 and 40 years of age. It is more common if you have a relative with cluster headache.

How is it treated?

Treatment starts with avoiding things that trigger the headache. These can include alcohol, tobacco smoke, nitroglycerin (a medicine for certain heart conditions), or things you may be allergic to. Oxygen or prescription medicines are the best treatments to stop the headache once symptoms start.

What can I do to prevent it?

Avoiding the things that trigger your headache is important. It may help to keep a diary of when your symptoms start and what you were doing before they began. Depending on how often you have the headaches, your doctor may prescribe medicines to prevent them from starting.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

American Academy of Family Physicians

<https://familydoctor.org/condition/headaches/>

American Migraine Foundation

<https://americanmigrainefoundation.org/resource-library/cluster-headache-2/>

National Headache Foundation

<http://www.headaches.org/>

National Organization for Rare Disorders - Rare Disease Database

<https://rarediseases.org/rare-diseases/cluster-headache/>

Organization for Understanding Cluster Headaches

<http://www.ouch-us.org/>

The Cluster Headache Support Group

<https://chsg.org>

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <https://familydoctor.org>.

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