



Understanding Cluster Headache



Not all headaches are alike

Cluster headache is different from other types like tension headaches and even migraine headaches. The pain from this rare condition can be more severe and can occur without warning. The pain stays on one side of the head, around the eye.

This is called cluster headache because you have a group, or cluster, of headaches that occur over a period of time. This is called a cluster period. **The entire cluster period may last a week, several weeks, months, or even longer.** One headache during this time can last from 15 minutes to 3 hours.



During these attacks, you may experience severe pain that is on one side of the head around the eye.

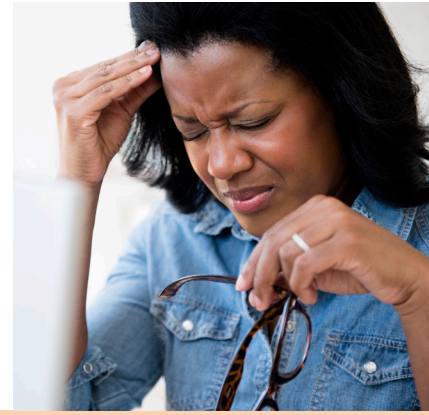
The pain from an attack can be so severe you may want to scream, cry, or hurt yourself to make the pain stop. You likely cannot lie down to get relief. Instead, you may be pacing the floor until the pain goes away.

Symptoms of cluster headache may include:

- Pain on one side, around the eye
- Red or watery eye on same side as pain
- Ear has feeling of fullness on same side as pain
- Forehead and face feel flushed
- Swollen or droopy eyelid on same side as pain
- Stuffy or runny nose

Cluster headache can be hard to diagnose

Cluster headache can be mistaken for other headache types. It can also be mistaken for other conditions, such as nerve pain or dental problems. In some cases, it can take years to find out if you have cluster headache or another problem.



Discuss these questions with your healthcare provider:

Do you have symptoms all the time or just sometimes?

How have the headaches affected your life?

What seems to improve your symptoms? What makes them worse?

Should you see a headache specialist or neurologist?

What medications have you taken for headaches?

What tests will you need?



Living your life with cluster headache

Cluster periods may have a major impact on your personal life and your work. But there are some things you can do to help manage the impact on your life. **For example, drinking alcohol and smoking may make a cluster headache attack more likely to occur. Consider removing these habits from your life.**



Personal life

You may depend on the help of family and friends during attacks. Consider asking them to run errands or help with household chores.



Work life

Some days you may be unable to work. If you choose to talk to your employer, discuss how you can handle these sudden interruptions.

Is it cluster headache or something else?



Check the boxes below that best describe how your headaches feel.

Then, go over your symptoms with your healthcare provider to see if you possibly suffer from one of these types of headache.

| | Cluster headache | Migraine headache |
|---|---|---|
| How often do you have headaches? | <input type="checkbox"/> 1-8 times per day, everyday, at the same time and these clusters can last a week, several weeks, or months | <input type="checkbox"/> Varies |
| What does the pain feel like? | <input type="checkbox"/> Burning or searing | <input type="checkbox"/> Throbbing or pulsating |
| Where is the pain? | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 side of head around the eye | <input type="checkbox"/> Starts on 1 side of head, but can spread to any part of head or neck |
| How quickly does the pain come on? | <input type="checkbox"/> Suddenly | <input type="checkbox"/> Slowly |
| How bad is the pain? | <input type="checkbox"/> Severe to very severe | <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate to severe |
| How long does the pain last if not treated? | <input type="checkbox"/> 15 minutes to 3 hours | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 hours to 3 days |
| What do you do during attacks? | <input type="checkbox"/> Pace around restlessly | <input type="checkbox"/> Rest and lie down |

Track your headaches, triggers, and symptoms



Make a copy of the diary below. Use it every time you have a headache. Then share it with your healthcare provider. This may help determine what kind of headaches you have.

| Date and time How long did it last? Pain level 1 = mild 2 = moderate 3 = severe | Describe what was happening when the headache started. (Sleeping, exercising, working, eating, under stress, weather change, other) | What symptoms did you have? (Sensitivity to light/noise, nausea, facial redness, runny nose, watery eye, droopy eyelid, other) | Did anything help stop the pain? |
|---|---|--|---|
| Oct 3 2:30 pm ----- 3 hours ----- Pain = 3 | Eating a snack - Toast with jelly | Pain around the right eye, droopy eyelid | No. Paced around my house, but couldn't lie down. |
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Additional resources

Check out these organizations for more information about cluster headache:

American Academy of Neurology[®]

aan.com

American Headache Society[®]

americanheadachesociety.org

National Headache Foundation[™]

headaches.org