

Kaiser Permanente

Headaches and Eye Problems

Do eye problems cause headaches?

Headaches are a very common health problem. They can have many different causes. Sometimes, but not usually, eye problems are a cause.

What causes headaches?

The most common cause of headaches is scalp and neck muscle contraction. Tension, anxiety, strain, stress, fatigue, and depression may all bring about sudden or gradual muscle contraction and pain.

Migraine headaches are another common type of headache. Migraines are usually much more severe than muscle contraction headaches. They are caused by changes in the blood vessels and blood flow in the head.

Headaches can also be caused by many diseases and disorders affecting other parts of the body. For example, ear problems, jaw problems, sinus problems, arthritis, high blood pressure, nerve diseases, and even tumors and aneurysms can cause headaches.

Rarely, eye problems cause headaches. For example, if you need reading glasses and read for a long time without glasses, or with glasses that are too weak, you may develop eye strain and a headache. Also, you may have a headache from reading or doing close work if your eyes are misaligned. That is, certain eye muscles may be too weak to focus up close. This weakness is one of the few eye problems that can often be successfully treated with eye muscle exercises.

How are headaches treated?

Treatment for headaches varies, depending on the cause. Proper diagnosis is important, so tell your health care provider if you have severe, frequent, or ongoing headaches. He or she will try to determine the cause and proper treatment.

If it appears that your headaches are caused by eye problems, you may be referred to an eye doctor. A new glasses prescription may be the treatment you need. If your eyes are misaligned, eye muscle exercises can sometimes be helpful.

If you have a severe headache along with a droopy eyelid and sometimes double vision it could be a sign of a rare, but very serious condition. You should seek medical care immediately.

How can I help prevent headaches caused by eye problems?

Make sure you have regular checkups with your eye doctor.