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Headache: When your child has a headache

Headaches are common in childhood. Very few children never experience a headache. Most headaches in children belong to the migraine family, even though they are sometimes referred to as benign headaches or tension headaches (musculoskeletal tension does not cause the pain).

If you can identify what is called a "trigger" for your child's headache - some activity or substance that sets off the headache, such as caffeine, stress, certain activities, or drugs - the easiest treatment is to remove the trigger.

Other important techniques for preventing and managing headaches include, rest, adequate sleep, drinking plenty of fluids, regular meals, and daily exercise. Any type of exercise, aerobic or non-aerobic, is fine.

If the headache causes significant discomfort to your child, you may give acetaminophen or ibuprofen (_____mg no more often than every six hours and no more than three doses a week - the pediatrician can explain how many pills to take).

If your pediatrician has given your child pain medicine, use it as soon as the pain begins.

When to call the pediatrician

Headache by itself will not harm your child and sometimes does not even require medication. However, headache can, rarely, be a sign of major illness; call the pediatrician if:

- Your child has a fever.
- Pain becomes worse and occurs more often over days or weeks or is associated with vomiting that persists and increases in frequency along with recurrent headaches.
- Pain awakens your child from sleep or is present when he or she wakes in the morning.
- Your child sees double, has weakness in an arm or leg, or is losing coordination.
- Pain is disabling and does not respond to acetaminophen or ibuprofen given three times a week.

