

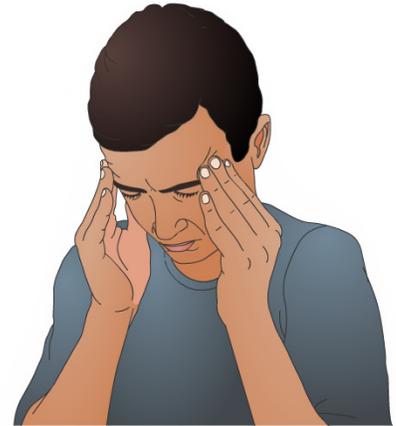
Cluster Headaches

Introduction

Cluster headaches are episodes of severe pain that affect one side of the head. They usually happen in cycles, or clusters. Clusters can last from weeks to months.

Pain from cluster headaches can be intense. It can wake you up at night and make it hard for you to do normal activities. Cluster headaches can also cause teary eyes and a stuffy nose.

This reference summary explains cluster headaches. It covers the symptoms and causes of the disorder. It also talks about how cluster headaches are diagnosed and treated.



Cluster Headaches

Headaches are the most common form of pain. Cluster headaches are a type of headache that cause episodes of severe pain that affect one side of the head. Cluster headaches usually happen in cycles, or clusters. Clusters can last from weeks to months.

Cluster headaches are rare. They are different from tension headaches and migraines. Cluster headaches are often described as the most painful type of headache. A tension headache is a period of mild and tight pain in the front of the head. A migraine is intense and throbbing pain in one side of the head. It can cause nausea, vomiting and sensitivity to light and sound.



This document is for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional or a recommendation for any particular treatment plan. Like any printed material, it may become out of date over time. It is important that you rely on the advice of a doctor or a healthcare professional for your specific condition.

Cluster headaches happen in cycles. A single attack usually lasts for 1 to 3 hours. Attacks can happen anywhere from once every few days to many times per day. Cycles of cluster headaches can last from weeks to months. Cycles of cluster headaches are usually followed by periods of time without headaches. These periods are called remissions. Remissions can last months or years.

Cluster headaches can be painful. They may make it hard for you to do your normal activities. But they do not cause long-term harm.

Anyone can have cluster headaches. But they are more common in men than women. Cluster headaches usually begin around age 30.

Symptoms

Cluster headaches happen quickly and without warning. They often start while you are sleeping. Pain from cluster headaches usually happens behind one of your eyes. The pain can spread to your face, head, neck and shoulders. The pain caused by cluster headaches is sharp and steady. It is often described as a burning sensation. The pain is often worse when lying down.

Other symptoms of cluster headaches include:

- Flushed face.
- Restlessness.
- Stuffy nose.
- Sweating.
- Teary, red or swollen eyes.

Cluster headaches may cause the eyelid that is on the side of the head that is affected by the headache to droop.

Causes

The exact cause of cluster headaches is not known. But some health care providers think they run in families.



This document is for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional or a recommendation for any particular treatment plan. Like any printed material, it may become out of date over time. It is important that you rely on the advice of a doctor or a healthcare professional for your specific condition.

Certain foods, substances and other factors can trigger a headache once a cycle of cluster headaches has begun. Common triggers of cluster headaches include:

- Alcohol and illegal drugs.
- Bright lights.
- Certain medications.
- Exercise.
- Heat.

Nitrite is a chemical that is used to preserve meat. Foods that are high in nitrites, such as many processed meats, can also trigger a cluster headache.

Diagnosis

Your health care provider will ask you about your personal and family medical history. Your health care provider will also ask about your current symptoms and perform a physical exam. Your health care provider may diagnose cluster headaches after talking to you about your symptoms. Your health care provider may check to see if your eyelid has drooped.

Your health care provider may recommend imaging tests. Imaging tests create pictures of the inside of your body. They can help your health care provider see if your headaches are a sign of a serious problem. These tests include MRIs and CT scans. An MRI uses a powerful magnet linked to a computer to create pictures of the inside of your body. A CT scan uses an x-ray linked to a computer to create pictures of the inside of your body.

Treatment

Treatment for cluster headaches can help ease pain during the headaches. Treatment can also help prevent headaches from happening in the future. To treat pain caused by cluster headaches, your health care provider may recommend:

- Oxygen.
- Local anesthetics.
- Other medications.



This document is for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional or a recommendation for any particular treatment plan. Like any printed material, it may become out of date over time. It is important that you rely on the advice of a doctor or a healthcare professional for your specific condition.

Breathing pure oxygen through a machine is an effective way to treat the pain from cluster headaches. Oxygen can decrease blood flow to the part of the brain that is causing the headache.

Local anesthetics are medications that numb a certain part of the body. Anesthetics used for cluster headaches are usually in the form of a nasal spray. These medications can block certain nerves behind the nose to prevent pain from cluster headaches. Triptans are medications often used to treat migraines. They cause the blood vessels in the brain to narrow, which can relieve pain. Triptans also can be effective in treating cluster headaches. Triptans come in the form of pills, injections and a nasal spray.

The following can help prevent cluster headaches:

- Avoiding headache triggers.
- Certain medications.
- Melatonin.

Triggers for cluster headaches include alcohol, certain medications and foods that are high in nitrites. Keeping a diary of your headaches can help you identify which triggers may cause your headaches.



Medications used to prevent cluster headaches include:

- Blood pressure medicines.
- Corticosteroids.
- Lithium carbonate.

Corticosteroids are drugs that are used to suppress inflammation. They work quickly and can reduce the length and frequency of cluster headaches.

Lithium carbonate is usually used to treat bipolar disorder. It is sometimes used to prevent cluster headaches if other medications have not worked.

Melatonin is a hormone that is naturally produced by the body. Taking melatonin at night can help prevent cluster headaches. It can also help prevent cluster headaches from disrupting your sleep.

Cluster headaches often get less frequent with time.

This document is for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional or a recommendation for any particular treatment plan. Like any printed material, it may become out of date over time. It is important that you rely on the advice of a doctor or a healthcare professional for your specific condition.

Summary

Cluster headaches are episodes of severe pain that affect one side of the head. They usually happen in cycles, or clusters. These clusters can last from weeks to months.

Pain from cluster headaches can be severe. It can wake you up at night and make it hard for you to do your normal activities.

A single attack usually lasts 1 to 3 hours. These attacks can happen anywhere from once every few days to many times per day. Cycles of cluster headaches can last from weeks to months.

Other symptoms of cluster headaches include:

- Flushed face.
- Restlessness.
- Stuffy nose.
- Sweating.
- Teary, red or swollen eyes.

The exact cause of cluster headaches is not known. But some health care providers think they run in families.

Once a cycle of cluster headaches has begun, certain foods, substances and other factors can trigger a headache. Common triggers of cluster headaches include:

- Alcohol and illegal drugs.
- Bright lights.
- Certain medications.
- Exercise.
- Heat.

Treatment for cluster headaches can help ease pain during the headaches. Treatment can also help prevent headaches from happening in the future. The following may be used to treat and prevent cluster headaches:

- Oxygen.
- Local anesthetics.
- Other medications.



This document is for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a doctor or healthcare professional or a recommendation for any particular treatment plan. Like any printed material, it may become out of date over time. It is important that you rely on the advice of a doctor or a healthcare professional for your specific condition.