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Photo: @earlykenihan Instagram

6 THINGS THAT COULD BE CAUSING THAT HEADACHE

Zoe Merriam

12th February 2016

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Nothing saps energy, productivity and overall wellbeing more than a throbbing headache. If you find yourself reaching for the Nurofen or Panadol on a regular basis, it might be time to take a good look at the causes behind your headaches and see what lifestyle changes you can make to ensure your painkiller addiction is a thing of the past.

1. Stress

While it may not be a huge surprise to learn that stress causes headaches, what is more shocking is that the International Headache Society suggests that stress is to blame for up to 90% of headaches. So why exactly do headaches cause stress?

"It's the effect of the stress hormone cortisol," explains Anthia Koullourous, naturopath at [Ovvio Organics](#), who says that while cortisol is essential as part of our fight or flight response, "it's when cortisol becomes excessive and we're secreting a lot of it throughout the day that our bodies become tense, we get inflammation, we have blood sugar deregulation, and headaches are just another symptom of that".

Not getting enough sleep is another form of stress which can contribute to headaches, again due to the over-production of cortisol.

"We have a sleep cycle which means we release cortisol through the day and melatonin through the night," says Anthia. "If we're

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stressed out at night then we're not producing enough melatonin which allows the body to rest and rejuvenate."

To assist in alleviating stress, Anthia recommends bathing in a bath sprinkled with Epsom salts.

"Epsom salts are high in magnesium and magnesium gets absorbed trans-dermally, so having a bath with Epsom salts can help reduce tension, as it's a muscle and nerve relaxant and anti-spasmodic. Alternatively you could take magnesium supplements."

Engaging in regular relaxation techniques such as meditation is also a great way to avoid stress in the long-term. "Meditation is a highly effective stress-management technique as it awakens the parasympathetic nervous system (the opposite of the fight-or-flight mode) which triggers a range of physiological reactions including a reduction in stress hormones," explains Nikki Jankelowitz from [Centred Meditation](#). "It also sparks the release of serotonin which helps constrict blood vessels and reduce the inflammation."

- Visit [Centred Meditation on Bodypass](#).

2. Muscular-skeletal imbalances

There are a myriad of different reasons why our muscular-skeletal system can be out of whack, from pre-existing conditions, to sleeping on the wrong pillow, carrying a too-heavy bag on one shoulder and most commonly, poor posture and/or a weak core.

"A classic headache trigger is poor posture at your computer/desk/mobile phone/iPad, where the shoulders slump forward, the upper back becomes rounded and the neck pokes forward," says Helen Tardent, Pilates instructor at [Pilates Moves](#), who says Pilates can be instrumental in correcting postural issues.

"The key exercises we teach in Pilates are to open up the chest, strengthen the upper back & deep neck stabilisers and educate our clients so that they can continue to benefit from sound biomechanics outside of their Pilates class."

- Visit [Pilates Moves with Bodypass](#).

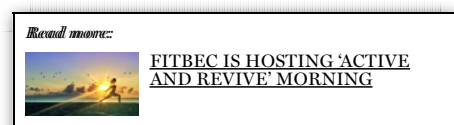
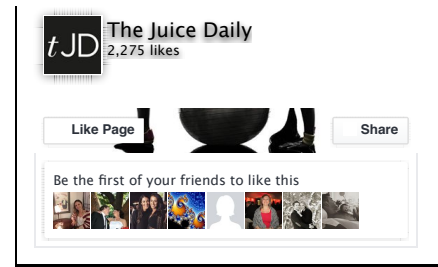
3. Food and drink

Many food and drinks can trigger headaches, with Anthia pointing to an obvious one being coffee. "Having too much coffee can cause headaches but people often also notice them when they haven't had enough coffee, a sign that they're experiencing caffeine withdrawal."

While Anthia says caffeine can have therapeutic benefits "to increase mental performance and cognitive function," if it's causing regular headaches then it's a sign that you're overdoing it.

"If you're finding you're getting a headache because you haven't had enough coffee, that's not good," she warns. "It means you've got a full addiction and you need to wean yourself off and start again, perhaps limiting yourself to only one or two a day."

Along with the commonly-known headache triggers such as food additives and sugar, Anthia says a less-known cause is a sensitivity or intolerance to amines, which are found in aged or fermented foods or long-cooked foods.



"Aged foods such as parmesan cheese, cultured vegetables like sauerkraut, those foods are high in amines and that can trigger a headache," she says. Keeping a food and headache diary can also help to pinpoint any headache triggers.

4. Dehydration

Dehydration headaches are surprisingly common and are characterised by their "throbbing" nature. They can usually be found in conjunction with other classic dehydration symptoms such as a dry mouth, fatigue and nausea.

Exercise, physically demanding work, alcohol consumption, vomiting, fever and diarrhea can all lead to high fluid losses, as of course can hot summer temperatures.

Given that our brains are 80% water, when we become dehydrated our brain tissue loses water, shrinking our brains and causing them to pull away from the skull.

That's certainly a good incentive to get hydrating! Anthia recommends the number of litres a day you drink should be at least 3% of your body weight, while excessive dehydration due to illness or extreme exercise may also require some electrolytes to help replenish those lost.

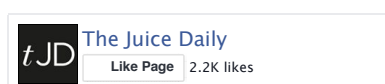
5. Medication

Anthia says another common cause of headaches is as a side effect of medication.

"It's a common side effect of any medication, so as a general rule, you might want to check what drugs you're taking and look up to see if headaches are a side effect."

6. Eye strain

If you've ever spent more than two consecutive hours staring at a computer (haven't we all?!), you could be suffering computer vision syndrome (CVS), which affects 64-90% of office workers, who commonly list a headache as a side effect. The condition is made more likely by uncorrected vision problems or incorrect prescriptions, so it might be time to schedule a trip to the optometrist. Otherwise you can reduce the damage by taking regularly breaks, blinking regularly and using eye drops, and ensuring your computer is in adequate lighting, perhaps installing an anti-glare shield if necessary.



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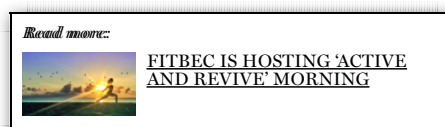
Zoe Meunier is a freelance journalist with over 20 years experience. A mum of two, she lives and breathes the daily challenges of trying to lead a healthy lifestyle while encouraging her kids to do the same. As such, she's always seeking out new ways of demystifying nutrition, fitness and wellness while making it accessible for all. She is especially interested in the health benefits of red wine and chocolate ...

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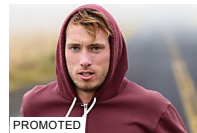
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>>>Any form of bacterial build up especially in tooth decay is #1 el supremo cause of headaches. Decay in the upper teeth gives the most intense pain as those nerves are wired directly into the brain like a superhighway for germs.

Other areas of bacterial buildup headache that are not well known are Feet, toes and ear-wax.

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