



Headache Wellness Center

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Headache and Exercise

The interaction between headaches and exercise is a complex one. While regular exercise is important for health maintenance and headache control it may result in the headache onset. "Exertional headaches" are those that may be triggered by any strenuous physical activity as well as coughing, sneezing, laughing, etc. Most of these exertional headaches are "benign" thus not life threatening. Rarely, exertion will trigger an ominous event such as a brain hemorrhage that will present with the sudden onset of a headache. Tests such as MRI scan may be needed to rule out dangerous exertional headaches. Exercise may also stop a headache once it begins.

Decreased headache pain with exertion is thought to occur due to vasoconstriction of cranial blood vessels as well as increasing amounts of available epinephrine, steroids and other serum chemicals. Unfortunately, because of the pain few patients are able to exercise during a severe headache.

Regular exercise is an important part of a headache control program. Vigorous aerobic workout stimulates brain chemicals such as serotonin, endorphans and enkephlins that can decrease headaches and pain perception. Serotonin related sleep cycles and mood (depression and anxiety) are also improved with exercise.

We recommend aerobic exercise 3-4 days per week for sessions of about 30 minutes. Select an exercise type you like....or at least tolerate. Swimming, rapid walking, jogging, biking, jumping rope, aerobic dancing, skating or racket sports are excellent. Begin slowly with a warmup and progress to your target heart range (THR).

<u>AGE - TARGET HEART RATE</u>	
20 - 140-180	45 - 121-156
25 - 136-175	50 - 116-149
30 - 133-171	55 - 112-144
35 - 129-166	60 - 101-139
40 - 126-162	65 - 105-135

By counting the pulse beats in 15 seconds and multiplying by four you can determine the beats per minute corresponding to your THR. Headaches decrease appetite, thus there is a tendency toward weight gain with headache relief. In addition, many medications that are effective in preventing headaches may increase appetite. Exercise is an essential component in a healthy, long-term weight control program. We believe that you will feel better, sleep better and have significantly better headache control with a regular exercise program