

Headaches and COVID-19

What you need to know

People with COVID-19 often report headaches that linger for several weeks after the first symptoms appear.

However, most headaches are not dangerous and cause no damage to the brain.

Types of headache

Headaches can take different forms, including migraines and tension headaches. The type of headache, its location, and the symptoms determine the treatments that are usually effective.

What triggers headaches?

Common headache triggers include dehydration, stress, anxiety, poor sleep, neck pain, and/or overstimulation.

Some triggers, such as stress, can be **hard to avoid**.

How you can help your headaches

1. Identifying your headache triggers can help guide your choice of strategies.

2. Use the strategies that work best for you, for example:

- Apply a hot or cold pack to your head or neck;
- Tie a piece of cloth fairly tightly around your head;
- Practise **deep breathing** exercises;
- Get regular exercise that doesn't cause your symptoms to flare up (see the **Fatigue and COVID-19** and **Post-exertional malaise and COVID-19** information sheets). Moderate exercise helps with blood circulation, muscle relaxation, oxygenation, and the production of endorphins, which can help to relieve your headaches;
- Practise visualization or other mindfulness activities;
- Go for a walk, sit or rest in a quiet place. This can help to relieve your headaches;
- Dim the lights;
- Self-massage your head and/or stretch your neck and shoulders muscles;
- Eat regular, healthy meals;
- Drink plenty of water;
- Practise good sleep hygiene (adopt a regular sleep schedule, do relaxing activities before bed, avoid screens right before bed, limit your alcohol and caffeine intake, avoid overeating before bed, create a calm atmosphere in your bedroom, etc.).

Take action!

Headaches following COVID-19 usually improve with time. If you find your headaches are not improving with the use of the above strategies, speak to your family doctor. They will help you come up with a personalized plan. They may also review medications, refer you to a specialist, or explore other treatment options with you.

What to watch for

If you experience any of these symptoms, you should seek medical care immediately:

- Worsening headaches;
- Headaches that often wake you from sleeping;
- Fevers associated with worsening headaches.

If you have any of these signs, this is a medical emergency, and you should call 911 immediately:

- Sudden, severe headache with nausea or vomiting;
- Loss of consciousness or seizures;
- Weakness in the arms or legs;
- Numbness;
- Problems speaking;
- Vision problems with headache;
- Balance problems.



Reference:

Post COVID-19 Interdisciplinary Clinical Care Network. (2021, 22 mars). Headaches in Post COVID-19 Recovery. www.phsa.ca/health-info-site/Documents/post_covid-19_headaches.pdf

Most symptoms of long COVID improve over time.
Be patient and kind to yourself.

If you have questions about long COVID, please email us at: readaptation.covid.ciSSsmo16@sss.gouv.qc.ca.

Our mission

To maintain, improve, and restore the health and well-being of the Québec population by making accessible an array of integrated and quality health and social services, while contributing to the social and economic development of Québec.

Our vision

Accessible and efficient health care and services that adapt to the needs of Québécois.

Our goals

The CISSS de la Montérégie-Ouest achieves its goals through its innovative approaches and stands apart through:

- its exemplary offer of care and integrated services based on interdisciplinarity, accessibility, and adaptability to the needs of its population;
- its willingness to question and improve its professional, clinical, and administrative practices;
- its appreciation of its personnel and the implementation of human resource management practices;
- its strong relationships with its partners.

Our values

Our actions are guided by five equal and interconnected values: compassion, collaboration, commitment, confidence and consistency.