Headaches: Attitudes and Impacts
Survey Results

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Executive Summary

Recurrent chronic headaches are estimated to affect more than 45 million Americans. Many individuals with chronic headaches never seek medical treatment preferring to self-medicate or suffer through their bouts without adequate treatment. They do not seek help because they do not regard their pain as severe enough to require help from a healthcare professional.

Headache is a leading cause of productivity and time lost from work. For many headache sufferers, the pain of their headaches is so severe that they cannot work effectively or contribute fully to the lives of their families. Many headache sufferers do not regard their pain as severe enough to merit treatment and attempt to downplay the effect their headaches have on their lives. Many individuals who do not suffer from headaches themselves contribute to this by minimizing or disregarding the headache sufferers’ pain.

This MedicineNet.com survey, delivered anonymously, probes the prevalence, severity and impacts of headache including:

- What type of headaches does the survey population have?
- Do more men or women have headaches?
- How severe are the headaches?
- What are the headache symptoms?
- What impact do headaches have on daily life?
- How do others respond to the sufferers’ headaches?
- What medications are respondents using to treat their headaches?

This survey was conducted between June 10, 2005 and June 21, 2005. The data reflects the opinions of a self-identified panel of 690 individuals visiting MedicineNet.com who indicated a personal interest in headaches.
Methodology

MedicineNet.com used a seven-question pop-up online survey to query 690 individuals responding to the question: “Do you or someone you care about have tension, migraine or cluster headaches?” There were 551 respondents, 79.9% of the total survey population, who indicated that they personally have tension, cluster or migraine headaches. The results reported in this study focus on the segment of the survey population who indicated that they suffered from these types of headache. All were visitors to content on headaches on the MedicineNet.com site. Responses were completely anonymous, and no visitor received the survey more than once, so the aggregated results represent unique individual respondents.

THE SURVEY POPULATION

Survey respondents (690 individuals) included those who suffer from tension, migraine or cluster headaches, their family members and those who are interested in learning more about headaches. A small portion of the sample did not answer this question. Among survey respondents 79.9% indicated that they have tension, migraine or cluster headaches. Family members of headache sufferers represented 12.8% of the surveyed population. Respondents interested in headaches were 6.7% of the surveyed population. Less than 1% of the survey population did not indicate why they are interested in headaches but completed the survey (See Figure 1: Survey Respondents and Headaches).

Figure 1: Survey Respondents and Headaches
n=690

- Headache Sufferers - 79.8%
- Family Member - 12.8%
- Interested - 6.7%
- Did Not Answer - .7%
The subset of survey population whose members indicated that they suffer from headaches was asked to identify their gender. The 551 survey participants, who indicated that they suffered from headaches, were predominantly female with 82.2% vs. 17.8% male. (See Figure 2: Headache Sufferers by Gender).

**Figure 2: Headache Sufferers by Gender**

n=551

- Women - 82.2%
- Men - 17.8%
Findings

The survey investigated five areas: the types of headaches suffered, the symptoms associated with these headaches, impact of chronic headaches on sufferers’ ability to conduct normal daily activities, how others respond to the sufferers’ chronic headaches, and medications used by sufferers to treat their headaches.

TYPES OF HEADACHE SUFFERED

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the type of headache that they suffer from most frequently. The three options presented included: tension (pressure around the head and over the eyebrows), migraine (intense, throbbing or pounding pain, usually on one side of the head) and cluster (intense short headaches that come in groups). As Figure 3: Types of Headaches Suffered shows, women report suffering migraines more frequently than men and men report having cluster headaches more frequently than women. Tension headaches do not show a disparity in frequency by gender. It should be noted that because the data is self-reported and many individuals do not seek medical attention, there may be a significant number of potentially inaccurate self-diagnoses.

Figure 3: Types of Headaches Suffered
n=551

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tension</th>
<th>Migraine</th>
<th>Cluster</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SEVERITY OF HEADACHE PAIN

The survey probed the symptoms associated with the recurrent headaches suffered by survey respondents. To assess the severity of the pain associated with their headaches, survey respondents were given a number of choices as to the intensity of the pain associated with their headaches. Respondents were asked if they suffered mild to moderate pain; moderate to severe pain; intense, pounding, throbbing and/or debilitating pain; steady aching (See Figure 4: Severity of Pain). The survey shows that most participants suffer from moderate to severe pain (30%) or intense pounding pain (31%). The survey shows that individuals suffering from recurrent headaches cope with considerable amounts of pain.

Figure 4: Severity of Pain
n=550

- Mild to Moderate Pain - 16%
- Moderate to Severe Pain - 30%
- Intense Pounding - 31%
- Steady Aching - 24%
LOCATION OF PAIN

Survey participants were also asked to identify the Location of their pain. Was the pain on one side of their head or both sides of the head? Not all respondents provided information on the location of their pain. Of those respondents providing this information, 69% indicated that they their pain was located on one side of their head; whereas, 30% report that the pain is located on both sides of their head (See Figure 5: Location of Pain). Chronic recurrent headaches sufferers can clearly identify where their head hurts.

Figure 5: Location of Pain
n=452
OTHER SYMPTOMS

The survey also probed whether participants suffered other symptoms including nausea/vomiting, sensitivity to light and/or sounds and/or had visual symptoms or auras. Many respondents reported suffering multiple symptoms – light and sound sensitivity accompanied with nausea or light sensitivity with visual disturbances. Of the 551 survey respondents reporting chronic headaches, 339 (62%) reported sensitivity to light or sound, 47% reported experiencing nausea/vomiting with their headaches and 38% experienced visual symptoms or auras (See Figure 6: Other Symptoms).

Figure 6: Other Symptoms
n=551

- Nausea/Vomiting - 47%
- Light Sensitivity - 62%
- Visual/Auras - 38%
IMPACT ON DAILY LIFE

Headaches are a leading cause of lost productivity in the American workplace. The survey examined the extent to which headache sufferers were forced by their headaches to alter their usual routines or make changes in planned activities. The survey asked whether individuals had: cancelled personal or family plans, postponed or cancelled a trip, stayed home from work, sought emergency medical attention, visited a doctor for treatment, or had experienced no impact from their headaches. As Figure 7: Impact of Headaches on Activities shows, 64% of headache sufferers who answered this question missed work due to their headaches, 63% cancelled family plans, 55% visited a doctor for their headaches, 28% cancelled travel plans, 24% sought emergency medical attention and only 15% had none of the impacts in the options list. Recurrent chronic headaches affect the sufferer’s work and everyday life.

Figure 7: Impact of Headaches on Activities
n=544

- Miss Work: 64%
- Cancel Family Plans: 63%
- Visit Doctor: 55%
- Cancel Travel: 28%
- Seek Emergency Medical: 24%
- No Impact: 15%
ATTITUDES OF OTHERS

Headache sufferers don’t suffer alone. Because the headache sufferer’s headaches frequently impact work and family life, family members, friends and employers become involved in the patient’s pain. The survey queried the perception of headache sufferers of the response of these individuals. Respondents indicated whether or not family; friends and colleagues; and employer are understanding and sympathetic when the respondent’s headaches. The survey also asked if individuals kept to themselves and did not make others aware of their headaches. As Figure 6: Attitudes of Others indicates family and friends are more sympathetic than employers; however, a third of headache sufferers suffer in silence. The survey indicates that headache sufferers find friends and family receptive and understanding of their condition.

Figure 9: Attitudes of Others
n=538

- Family Understands: 64%
- Friends Understand: 46%
- Keep to Self: 33%
- Employer Understands: 30%
- Employer Does Not Understand: 14%
- Family Does Not Understand: 11%
- Friends Do Not Understand: 10%
HEADACHE MEDICATIONS

There are a number of medications used to treat headaches. Most headache sufferers rely on over-the-counter medications to relieve their pain. The surveyed headache sufferers most frequently report using over the counter medications. These are easy to obtain and provide some level of relief. Of surveyed headache sufferers 49% reported taking ibuprofen (Advil, Nuprin, Motrin IB, Medipren); 36% acetaminophen (Tylenol), 23% aspirin and 18% naproxen (Aleve) to relieve their pain. Of the prescription medications used to combat headaches, triptans (Zomig, Maxalt, Amerge, Axert, Frovalan) are used by 14% and ergots (Ergomar, Wigraine, Cafergot, and Migranal) by 4% of the sample, 36% rely on other prescription medications. It was clear from the survey that headache sufferers use multiple medications in their attempt to deal with their aching heads. Many reported using both over the counter medications and prescription drugs.

Figure 8: Medications Used to Treat Headaches
n=546

- Ibuprofen: 49%
- Other Prescription Medication: 36%
- Acetaminophen: 36%
- Aspirin: 23%
- Naproxen: 18%
- Triptans: 14%
- Ergots: 4%
Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from this survey:

- Those who suffer from headaches (79.8%) predominated within the survey population.
- Most individuals suffering from chronic and recurrent headaches reported having migraine headaches (57%). Tension headaches (34%) were reported less frequently and cluster headaches (9%) were reported least often.
- More women (60%) report suffering from migraines than men (41%); however, men (22%) reported having cluster headaches in greater numbers than women (7%).
- Patients with headaches endure considerable amounts of pain. Just 16% of the survey population reported having mild to moderate pain.
- Most headache sufferers reported experiencing pain on just one side of their head (69%).
- Headache sufferers have multiple other unpleasant symptoms including nausea/vomiting (47%), light sensitivity (62%), and visual auras (38%).
- Most headache sufferers find it necessary to alter their lifestyle to cope with their headaches. Of the headache sufferers in the surveyed population 64% miss work and 63% cancel family plans.
- According to the survey family (64%) and friends (46%) are sympathetic to headache sufferers, but employers are less so (30%).
- Ibuprofen (49%) and acetaminophen (36%) are the over the counter medications most frequently used to combat recurrent chronic headaches. A range of other medications is used in addition to the over the counter medications.
- This survey shows that patients with chronic recurrent headaches face difficult decisions on how to cope with their painful headaches.
MedicineNet.com – Additional Resources

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- **User-friendly** -- articles are written by doctors in easy-to-understand language.
- **Comprehensive** -- doctors not only present scientific knowledge, they also explain how they make treatment and diagnostic decisions.
- **Relevant** -- doctors select articles and news items that are clinically relevant.

**MedicineNet.com’s Headache Overview**
http://www.medicinenet.com/migraine/focus.htm

**MedicineNet.com’s Headache Main Article**
http://www.medicinenet.com/headache/article.htm

**MedicineNet Home Page**
http://www.medicinenet.com

**Diseases and Conditions**
http://www.medicinenet.com/diseases_and_conditions/article.htm

**Symptoms and Signs**
http://www.medicinenet.com/symptoms_and_signs/article.htm

**Procedures and Tests**
http://www.medicinenet.com/procedures_and_tests/article.htm

**Medications (non-prescription and prescription drugs)**
http://www.medicinenet.com/medications/article.htm

**MedTerms™ Online Medical Dictionary**
http://www.medterms.com

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