

# SHAPE

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## Headache remedies during colder months



**If you are prone to getting headaches in winter, try the following methods to reduce your risk.**

Headaches in winter can be triggered by a number of things – such as the changes in temperature and weather, creating a change in barometric pressure. A headache can also persist after having a cold, which is more common in winter. According to Dr Elliot Shevel the Medical Director at [The Headache Clinic](#), if you are prone to getting headaches in winter, try the following methods to reduce your risk:

### Eat healthily

Eating healthily can reduce the risk of triggering a headache this winter. You should eat balanced meals that incorporate vegetables and fruit such as apples. Apples contain a detoxifying ingredient called pectin. You should also include protein such as chicken. Eating chicken soup can be a good treatment for a winter illnesses, as chicken contains a natural antibiotic.

### Get sufficient vitamin D

Winter can exacerbate the symptoms of depression when we are more house-bound and less active outside. Depression has been shown to be a common risk factor to migraine and frequent headaches.

While we can't do anything about the natural rotation of the earth and the short sunlit days, we can help ourselves to feel better. Vitamin D deficiency is common in the general population, and has been associated with a variety of diseases in multi-organ systems, including high blood pressure, diabetes, [cancer](#), multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia, [heart attacks](#), stroke, osteoporosis, and [depression](#).

An observational study presented at the 50th Annual Meeting of the American Headache Society, showed that 41.8% of patients with chronic migraine were deficient in vitamin D, and the longer individuals have had chronic migraine, the more likely they are vitamin D deficient, and the more vulnerable they are to depression.

Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin, sources include [salmon](#), [sardines](#), shrimp, milk, and eggs. It is also produced when ultraviolet rays from sunlight hit the skin and trigger vitamin D synthesis by the liver and kidneys.

## Get enough sleep

A recent study published in the *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*, tested 32 women with tension-type headache. The investigators studied self-report data on headache triggers, pain interference with sleep, and self-management strategies for pain. 81% reported that going to sleep was the most frequently used self-management strategy, and this group also rated going to sleep as the most effective strategy. So don't lose out on sleep this winter. Fatigue is a major trigger of headaches as well, aim to sleep seven or eight hours a night.

## Keep warm

Wrapping up warm during winter can help to avoid headaches as the body is protected against blasts of cold wind, which can cause flu like symptoms including headaches. You should wear warm clothing that especially covers the chest, neck and head.

## Avoid dehydration

Dehydration is a common trigger, adequate intake of fluid throughout the day to prevent headaches. The human brain is more than 75% water, and it is very sensitive to the amount of water available to it. When the brain detects that the water supply is too low, it begins to produce histamines. This is essentially a process of water rationing and conservation, in order to safeguard the brain in case the water shortage continues for a long period of time. The histamines directly cause pain and fatigue, in other words a headache and the low energy that usually accompanies it.

It is best to drink plain water, as many carbonated soft drinks contain substances that can also trigger headaches. Substances that headache sufferers should avoid include common ingredients in soft drinks such as caffeine and aspartames. Drinking green tea can also help to build the body's immune system to fight off viruses such as colds and flu.

## Don't take too much medication

Beware of Medication Overuse Headache. Medication is only appropriate for someone who suffers with headache a few times a month. According to the International Headache Society, if you are taking headache medication more than twice a week you are at risk of developing Medication Overuse Headache. This means that the drugs you are taking will cause the headache or migraine to become more severe and more frequent over time. This leads to a downward spiral into constant medication use and constant pain. The more medication you take, the more pain you are in, the more medication you need, and the cycle continues.

## Keep track of your headaches

Find out what triggers your headaches by keeping a headache diary. Each time you suffer from a migraine, make a note about the warning signs, triggers, and severity. If you can discover some of your personal triggers, you may be able to avoid future headaches. This is important as it will give your medical professional an accurate history of your headaches. Your specialist will then be able to diagnose conditions such as medication overuse headache and consider treating you through non-drug methods. A Migraine Diary is available at [www.headacheclinic.co.za](http://www.headacheclinic.co.za) free of charge to assist you.

## Get sufficient exercise

Taking part in physical activities are not only great fun, but also an important part of a healthy lifestyle. Take up some form of everyday physical activity that will help you stay healthy. Learn the right stretching exercises to

stretch the muscles of the head, face, neck and jaw. Stretching should be gentle and soothing, not agonizingly painful. For a free copy of the exercises, contact [The Headache Clinic](#) on 0861 678 911. These exercises will help you to stretch the neck and jaw muscles carefully and will give results.

## Treating the underlying cause

If your headache persists after winter, it is imperative that you undergo a multidisciplinary investigation to diagnose the specific factors behind the recurring headache. There are a number of healthier treatment options to medication available right here in South Africa. It is possible to get to the bottom of the problem and resolve the pain permanently so that you can enjoy the quality of life you deserve.



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