

Script – Print – One Big Headache

Recent Study Reveals 50% of People Suffer From Headaches

If you suffer from headaches, you can take some small comfort in the fact that you're not alone.

According to a recent [study](#) in the *Journal of Headache and Pain*, more than 50% of people in the world have suffered from some type of headache disorder – whether it's migraine, tension, cluster or some other type of headache.

"People can get headaches for any number of reasons," says Dr. Brandon Strawn, a neurologist with OSF HealthCare. "There are musculoskeletal reasons, people carry stress and tension in their neck and shoulders and back; sometimes people have environmental factors, weather changes, and exposures to perfumes. Caffeine is a big one. We can either look at the increased rates of headaches from the standpoint of triggers increasing. Stress rates, anxiety, depression is all on the rise, caffeine use has increased every decade over the last 50 years – these are all reasons headaches have increased as well."

The study was performed by researchers at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Norway who reviewed more than 350 publications from 1961 to 2020 to see how widespread headaches were around the world. Most of the publications analyzed adults ages 20 to 65.

Among their findings women tend to have more headaches than men. About 17% of women in the study reported migraines, for example, compared to 8.6% of men.

"In general, headaches and particularly migraines are more common in women," says Dr. Strawn. "There are thoughts to being hormonal underpinnings to that. We know some women will get migraines more commonly at a particular time of the month or during hormonal changes later in their lives. There are other studies going on that look at factors that are unique to women versus men, and that may also play a role in that increase in headaches."

The study estimated that about 15% of the world's population experiences a headache on any given day – about 7% of those are migraines. As far as treatment goes, much of it depends on the type of headache and the individual.

"The best practice for treating headaches usually comes down to the underlying cause," says Dr. Strawn. "If a primary care doctor can identify a stressor or can help manage anxiety or depression or tension type headaches, they can arrange physical therapy for someone who has cervicogenic headaches (headaches coming from the neck) or they can start a first-line medication for migraine. In many cases they can address the problem pretty quickly."

If you're one who suffers from headaches, whether it's an occasional sinus headache or a full-blown migraine, all hope is not lost. Dr. Strawn says treatment modalities have come a long way in the past 40 years.

"I think the take-home message is everyone gets headaches but there are a lot of different options for treating those headaches and if we can find a root cause to address those triggers and manage that with a primary care doctor that would be the first goal we have," he says. "Beyond that there are many other options for managing symptoms and the pain in particular but ultimately with a methodical approach most people are going to find some relief."

For more information about headaches, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).