From financial worries to work load, we are dealing with ever-increasing stressors in our daily lives that can often blindside healthful habits before you even realize it. Skipping meals or exercise, grabbing fast food or a quick fix from the vending machine, drinking more caffeinated beverages, and losing sleep can all tend to make you more susceptible to fatigue or illness. Use these guides to prioritize yourself and stay healthy!

Preventing Headaches & Muscle Tension

If you suffer from headaches or are experiencing neck and shoulder pain, it may be your body’s way of telling you it is tense. Some headaches are generally thought to result from muscle tension, emotional stress, or fatigue. Headaches and muscle tension are common reactions to the increasing pressures at work and in our lives. It is possible to make minor adjustments that will help you feel better and in control.

To prevent tension headaches, try one or more of these tips:

- **Reduce sensory inputs.** Take a five minute break every hour or two and close your eyes. It helps to give your eyes a rest, especially after a long time working at the computer or reading.
- **Drink plenty of fluids.** Don’t forget to drink fluids, especially water, to avoid dehydration which may contribute to headaches.
- **Eat something.** Make sure you are eating regularly; do not skip meals. Low blood sugar due to skipping breakfast or lunch is a common cause of headaches.
- **Take a nap.** Short 20-minute rest breaks or naps often re-charge your energy and may help prevent a late afternoon tension headache. However, avoid naps if you have trouble sleeping through the night.

To relieve the tightness in your head, neck, or shoulders, try one or more of these quick techniques:

- **Relax your muscles.** Several times a day or when you become aware of shoulder tension, gently stretch your neck muscles. Drop your shoulders down, let your arms fall loose by your side, slowly rotate your head from side to side, and gently bend your neck so that your head falls forward. Repeat until some of the tension is released. Use the Stretch Break software on your computer to remind you to stretch and to lead you through several stretches. To download the software, log on to the blu portal, enter your CalNet ID, click on the People tab, and look for Stretch Break under Job Tools.
- **Focus on breathing.** Take a few moments to focus on inhaling and exhaling slowly; inhale through your nose deeply -- filling the air in your lungs all the way through to your abdomen -- counting slowly to ten, then exhaling in the same manner. Repeat several times.
- **Use cold and hot together.** To soothe and comfort the muscles in the back of the neck and shoulder, try a cold compress followed by a warm compress.
- **Exercise.** One of the most powerful and effective methods for relieving muscle tension is exercise. A brisk walk around the block is a fast and simple way to release some pent-up tension.
Use massage. Knead the muscles along your shoulders, neck, and back of the skull. Gently rub your head, forehead, temples, facial muscles, and jaw to relieve tension. Recreational Sports offers massage services. Schedule an appointment online or in person at RSF.

Watch your caffeine intake. Sometimes a headache is a symptom of “caffeine withdrawal,” the result of regularly consuming too much caffeine, then suddenly decreasing the amount of caffeine consumed. To avoid this type of headache, watch your caffeine intake so that it does not exceed 200 mg a day (about one to two cups of brewed coffee). If you are trying to cut back on caffeine, decrease the amount you consume gradually over a period of a few days to a week.

Although many headaches are generally thought to result from muscle tension, emotional stress, or fatigue, it is important to note there are other causes of headaches. If your headache persists for days, weeks, or even months, consult with a physician. The same is true for muscle tension. If you are experiencing pain in your neck and shoulders that persists for days, weeks, or longer, or if the pain increases in intensity, consult your physician.

Also available at www.uhs.berkeley.edu

Staying Healthy During Stressful Times:
- Eating Well
- Managing Caffeine Use
- Managing Stress
- Preventing Headaches and Muscle Tension
- Sleeping Soundly
- Staying Active

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