

Understanding Your Vision Part 3: When Headaches Are Linked to Vision

Headaches are a fairly frequent complaint, but in some cases they are linked to visual function. Increased focusing effort, particularly in low vision, can contribute to recurrent headache.

How Vision Can Lead to Headaches

Clear vision depends on accurate focusing (accommodation), stable eye alignment (binocular vision), and a smooth optical surface. When any of these are affected, the visual system works harder to maintain clarity, often leading to headache around the eyes, forehead, or temples.

How Do Vision-Related Headaches Present?

These headaches usually build up gradually and are linked to visual tasks.

Common features include:

- Dull, aching discomfort around the **forehead, temples, or behind the eyes**
- Symptoms that **worsen with reading, screen use, or detailed work**
- Headaches appearing **later in the day**
- **Blurred vision or difficulty focusing**
- **Eye strain or tired eyes**
- Relief with **rest or breaks**

Poorly fitted glasses may also cause localised soreness around the sides of the head or behind the ears.

Common Causes

Uncorrected or changing prescription

Even small changes can increase focusing effort and lead to headaches.

Increased visual effort in low vision

Tasks such as reading small print or working in poor lighting place extra demand on the visual system.

Prolonged phone and screen use

Extended phone use, especially scrolling or reading small text, increases visual demand, reduces blinking, and contributes to fatigue and headache.

Eye strain (asthenopia)

Long periods of near work can tire the eyes. In low vision, tasks often take longer, increasing strain.

Binocular vision difficulties

Poor coordination between the eyes can lead to headache and difficulty concentrating.

Poorly fitted or unsuitable glasses

Tight spectacle temples may press on the sides of the head or behind the ears, causing discomfort that can feel like a headache. Poor lens alignment can also increase strain.

Dry eye (tear film instability)

Dryness reduces visual comfort and clarity, increasing effort and contributing to headaches.

What Can Help

- Ensure glasses are up to date and well fitted.
- Take regular breaks, especially during screen use.
- Use good lighting and increase text size where needed.
- Lubricating drops may help if dryness is present.
- Regular eye examinations are important

When to Be Concerned

Seek assessment if headaches are frequent, worsening, or affecting daily life, especially if associated with blurred or double vision, eye pain, or symptoms affecting one eye more than the other. Sudden severe headache with visual disturbance requires urgent attention.

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