



HEADACHES AND CHIROPRACTIC

Headaches are one of the most common reasons for visiting the doctor. More than 250 million work days, in the United States, are lost each year due to headache at a cost of 25 billion dollars per year. There are many types and causes of headaches. Muscle tension headaches and migraine headaches are by far the most common types of headaches, but sinus infections and other problems such as high blood pressure can also lead to headaches. Regardless of the cause, if you have a headache, you want it to end. Fast!

This has produced a huge market for medications that cover up the symptoms of headaches. Powerful drugs can numb your nervous system so the pain doesn't register. While these approaches may be convenient, they can cause adverse effects and kidney or liver damage. Worse, they don't correct the underlying cause of the headache.

Headaches are rarely a sign of immediately serious or life threatening health problems. Some headaches are so painful, however, that it may seem that something is very wrong inside the head. A person may present to the medical doctor seeking an explanation of the cause of the headache. Many medical doctors order expensive tests such as MRI or CT scans of the brain to try to visualize the cause of the headache. It has been reported that only one in 11,200 patients with headache have a problem that shows up on these types of tests. It is surprising, then, to note that between one-quarter to one-third of headache sufferers have had a CT or MRI scan. Most often the doctor and/or patient are searching for answers in the wrong direction.

Headache is a very common condition in patients with chiropractic problems. A cause of headaches can be from spinal bones in the neck that aren't supporting your head properly. This can affect nerves, muscles and even the blood supply to your head. Research has shown that the most common types of headaches respond well to chiropractic care. The vast majority of even the most severe headaches are relieved when spinal subluxations (spinal joints that are out of alignment, don't move well and also irritate the nerves) and jaw problems are corrected. The effects that these types of problems have on the nerves, often results in pain in the head.

Chiropractic doctors locate areas of the spine that aren't moving properly. They notice spinal curves. They look at your posture and your ability to turn and bend. The chiropractor is also trained to recognize the signs of rare problems that may require immediate medical attention.

If you're a good chiropractic candidate, your care will consist of a schedule of chiropractic adjustments. These help normalize spinal function, help restore essential spinal curves, improve circulation and reduce nerve irritation. Chiropractic care and periodic checkups are useful ways of eliminating the most common cause of headaches (subluxation of neck joints).

What causes headaches?

Headaches occur for a reason. A headache is your body's way of signaling you that something is not right. Some of the milder headaches are the result of occasional "morning after" problems brought on by excess smoking, drinking or eating. Others may be the indirect symptom of eye strain, improper diet, hunger, poor lighting, excessive noise, constipation, foul air, daily pressures or infection, to name a few. In rare cases, headaches can be attributed to organic conditions such as brain tumors or diabetes. Our examination process helps identify the most likely cause.

Doctors of Chiropractic recognize that a headache is the body's warning alarm that pain may also be attributed to muscle tension and irritation of the nerves and blood vessels in the neck. The seven cervical vertebrae (spinal bones) can become misaligned from excessive physical and emotional stress. This misalignment can irritate the nerve roots in the neck and may even cause minor constriction in some vessels which supply blood and minor constriction in some vessels which supply blood to the brain. When this happens, a headache can strike. once, twice, and again and again. If not cared for, more serious symptoms may develop.

Can headaches be serious?

A headache is no stranger to most people. One estimate is that headaches occur in 9 out of 10 people. Some are mild but annoying, localized pain that may be attributed to one or more of a variety of causes. Chronic, recurring headaches, which can be the most serious, are of two major types -- migraine and tension. These may be frequent and intense, and may involve the severe throbbing, nausea, irritability and sensitivity to bright light common to the migraine or "sick" headache. These headaches can be debilitating. They can affect the vision and bodily functions, bring on pain and sensation elsewhere in the body and even change moods and personality. To find relief, if only temporary, the American public pours out millions of dollars a year for headache remedies.

What can the Doctor of Chiropractic do to help?

Your Doctor of Chiropractic is primarily concerned with helping correct any neuromusculoskeletal (nerves, muscles and bones of the body) source of your headache. He or she will perform a special spinal examination to determine whether the symptoms may be alleviated by chiropractic care. The examination can determine whether the headache may be

caused, or aggravated by any misaligned vertebrae in the spine, a condition known as a subluxation, which may be creating undue nerve interference.

Chiropractic care may help prevent unnecessary tension and/or irritation in the neck and head. In some instances, chiropractic adjustments (specific spinal manipulations) can provide immediate relief for headache victims. A study of 87 headache victims who were treated with chiropractic adjustments over a two-year period revealed marked improvement. The common migraine had ceased altogether or was much improved in 85 percent of the females and 50 percent of the males. For those with classical migraine, the improvement rate was 78 percent in females and 75 percent in males.

Every headache victim is an individual case and may require special instructions or recommendations from their chiropractor. If your condition requires the attention of other health care specialists, your chiropractor will refer you to them.

How long will it take for my headaches go away?

Some patients enjoy results quickly. Others notice a slow decline in their symptoms after several weeks or longer of chiropractic care. It's impossible to predict. If you've had chronic headaches for many years, improvement can take time.

What if I don't have a headache when I come in

Chiropractic isn't an aspirin! *Repeated visits, even when you're feeling better, can help retrain and strengthen the muscles that support our spine.* Just as it takes more than one or two workouts in the gym to get in shape, it takes time for your spine to heal.

What if Chiropractic doesn't work?

Headaches may be common, but they're not normal. Every headache has a cause. If we're unable to find and correct the cause of your headaches, we can refer you to other specialists who may be able to help. Your health is our only goal.

What can I do to ease the pain?

People often consume over-the-counter pain pills to alleviate headaches, but you may be able to help relieve pain without medication by applying some simple common sense methods.

Consider these guidelines for possible temporary relief:

Apply an ice pack or cold compress to the affected area which may numb and help alleviate the pain.

- Apply heat to the shoulder and/or neck muscles to help relax the muscles.
- Gently massage the back of the neck periodically to help reduce stress and discomfort.
- Lie down to rest in a quiet atmosphere with 1 rolled up towel or small pillow supporting the neck without pushing the head forward.
- Immediately avoid bright lights and noise.

Too often individuals have become accustomed to self-medication which may mask potentially dangerous conditions. Indiscriminate use and/or over-reliance on pain medications in lieu of a proper examination and diagnosis is not recommended. Early examination and diagnosis are essential to proper care. Consult your Doctor of Chiropractic for an evaluation and/or referral to another health care specialist.

What can I do to help prevent headaches?

- Maintain good posture to help reduce misalignments in the bones of the neck.
- Seek to avoid situations of pressure and tension that can bring on a headache. If you can't avoid pressure, try to learn to cope with it more effectively.
- Find time to take periods of rest to relax, close your eyes, breathe some fresh air and even take a brisk walk.
- Avoid getting overtired to the point of exhaustion.
- Exercise regularly to stimulate the circulation of blood to the head and to maintain neuromusculoskeletal flexibility.
- Avoid too little or too much sleep, which can be contributing factors to headaches.
- Don't sleep on your stomach. Either sleep on your side with you head supported so that it is level with your spine, or on your back with a small pillow or rolled up towel supporting your neck rather than your head. A cervical pillow is best.
- Don't overindulge in food or drink, and don't smoke.

Words of Wisdom: Duke University Releases Headache Evidence Report

The Foundation for Chiropractic Education is proud to announce the evidence reports have now been updated on both cervicogenic and tension-type headaches. Among the many options for care available, chiropractic was shown to have superior results.

Compared to amitriptyline use, chiropractic had favorable results for patients with tension-type headaches.

Compared to various soft tissue procedures, chiropractic care produced sustained improvement in headache frequency and severity for patients with cervicogenic (from the neck) headache.

Compared to other physical treatment methods (physiotherapy, acupuncture, and electrical stimulation) the evidence supporting chiropractic appears to be more robust.

I've always said that there are many causes of headaches, but aspirin deficiency is not one.

So, if you know of anyone who suffers from headaches, help them to get off the drugs (which can cause many side effects) and get into see a chiropractor. They will thank you for it.