

SHIRLEY RD CHIROPRACTIC

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Headache – Humanity’s most common pain

Headache is the most frequent reason for people to seek advice from their health practitioner and is the primary reason for 10% of visits to chiropractors (1). Numerous causes exist, but in many instances headaches are a direct result of irritation to the nerves communicating with the head and neck (1,2). Research shows chiropractic care to be of great benefit to many headache sufferers (3,4,5,6).

What Causes Headaches?

There are many different types of headaches. Each type has different causes - anything from stooping over a desk all day to oversleeping or eating chocolate.

There is broad agreement in the health science community that most headaches have more than one cause:

VASCULAR - Blood vessels and circulation

NEUROLOGICAL - Nerves/Nervous system

GENETIC - Inherited characteristics

BIOCHEMICAL - Substances within the body

PSYCHOLOGICAL - Mind and/or emotions

ENVIRONMENTAL - Surroundings

BIOMECHANICAL – Poor movement

SOMATIC - Muscles, ligaments, soft tissues.



Health professionals tend to group headaches into major types. Once you know what type of headache you suffer, it can help you to pin point the cause, what you can do to prevent it and which treatment will work best.

Migraine

- “I get headaches on one side of my head and they really throb - often in time with my pulse”
- “I’m sensitive to light and noise when I get headaches”

- “I start to feel sick in my stomach and even vomit before or when I get a headache”
- “I get warning signs - like seeing bright lights or wavy lines before a headache starts”

Tension Type Headache (TTH)

- “I get pain in the back of my neck and it moves up towards my temples”
- “My headache feels like a tight band around my head or a weight pressing down on my head”
- “I get a dull throbbing pain behind my eyes, temples and skull”
- “My neck and shoulders feel stiff and sore when I have a headache”
- “Can develop into a migraine headache if I don’t catch it in time”

Cluster Headache

- “My headaches come in bouts, lasting for several weeks”
- “When I get these bouts of headaches, I get excruciating pain behind one eye or on one side of my head”
- “I get a watery, red eye and a blocked nostril on the side of my head with the headache”

Sinus Headache

- “The pain is in my face - usually between my eyes and cheek bones - it’s even painful to touch”
- “The pain is worse when I wake up or bend over”

Occasionally, headache may be a sign of a more serious condition. The chiropractor is educated to assist in the management of headache, and refer the patient to other health care practitioners when necessary.

Headaches take a toll not only in discomfort, but in lost workdays. A one year survey of almost 8,000 headache sufferers found that migraines account for an average of 8.1 total lost workdays, tension headaches 1.5 days and other miscellaneous headaches 6.5 days per year. Headaches easily outstrip low back pain as the most common health problem (7).

Notes for the migraine sufferer

Migraine is a chronic illness and is often associated with many other conditions, such as: depression, irritable bowel syndrome, excessive daytime sleepiness, asthma, epilepsy, restless legs syndrome, hypertension, vertigo, stroke, fibromyalgia, systemic lupus erythematosus and Raynaud's Syndrome (8).

Trigger factors

Migraine sufferers are usually slow to adapt to neurological/body changes. They are often susceptible to multiple trigger factors, including: stress, alcohol, glare, hormonal change, change in sleep habit, weather change, dietary factors and altitude.

It is rare to cure the migraine sufferer. But, through knowledge you can help to control your environment and help to reduce the frequency and intensity of your migraines.

Things to try

1. Dietary

- Eat in a manner which best keeps your blood sugars level and avoid spiking your levels (eat your protein first during a meal and never eat sweet foods on an empty stomach!).
- Coeliac disease is an autoimmune gluten hypersensitivity that is 10x more prevalent in migraine sufferers.

2. Vitamin D

- Up to 41.8% of migraineurs are Vit D deficient
- Vit D3 is synthesized in the skin when exposed to UV-B rays from the sun. It is also found in fish, eggs and fortified milk.
- A daily supplementation of 1000 IU is typically recommended but up to 4000 IU may be of more use.

3. CoEnzyme Q10

- 61.3% of patients achieved at least a 50% reduction in frequency of attacks by the end of a 4 month trial.
- 150-300mg/day is recommended and is available from health food stores.

4. Increase water intake

- Drink at least 2L of water per day and a high water intake during the early phase of a migraine can help to abort the episode (hypothalamus inhibits the trigeminal).

5. Sleep

- Migraineurs should awaken at the same time every day – even on weekends. Get up and walk around and then you can go back to bed!
- 9 hours per night is best (or 6 hours is the next best).
- Ideally best not to be woken by an alarm.

6. Rose coloured glasses

- When choosing sunglasses to reduce glare, purchase glasses from the red end of the spectrum rather than blue tinted glasses.
- This reduces high intensity light stimulation from the blue spectrum and can reduce migraine attacks.

The Chiropractic Approach

The chiropractor will examine your spine to determine its involvement in your problem. If a thorough examination reveals reduced range of motion, loss of normal spinal curves, or mechanical restrictions, chiropractic care should be considered. A programme of management will be recommended if it is considered that chiropractic care may be of benefit.



After initial care to alleviate your problem, your chiropractor may recommend a suitable level of ongoing care to assist in maintaining good health and preventing future problems.

References

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