

## **HEADACHE EVALUATION AND TREATMENTS** by Dr. Bryan D. Royer Published in Healthy Living News – August 2007

Headaches are one of the most common pain conditions that afflict individuals. Headaches cost the U.S. economy nearly \$26 billion per year. The cost comes from not only missed work but from severely decreased productivity while at work. The problem is not the occasional headache that we all get from time to time, but chronic, recurring headaches that aggravate and drain you throughout the day. One in six people get chronic headaches and often, these headaches start during childhood and continue to plague people well into their adult lives.

What do you do when you get a monster headache? Do you pop pills and pray it goes away? What do you do when it comes back and it is worse than before?

### **HEADACHE EVALUATION**

“Primary” headaches are when the headache itself is the problem and there is not any medical emergency. Tension, migraine and cluster headaches are all examples of primary headaches and account for over 95% of all headaches. A “secondary” headache can occur when another medical condition causes it. A medical emergency can exist if a headache is the result of trauma or if it wakes someone from sleep. If a chronic headache has changed in its frequency, severity or typical pattern or if there is no prior history of headaches, then this could be a sign that a more serious medical condition exists.

Headaches are often a result of problems in the neck and spine. This is a biomechanical problem and treatments that focus on restoring the proper function of the cervical spine are usually very successful. Other things can trigger the onset of a headache like food allergies, noises, lights, stress and some behaviors or emotions.

Regardless of the severity of the headache, a comprehensive history and physical examination should be performed to determine if your problem is serious or easily treated. Additional testing, such as X-rays, laboratory tests and even advanced imaging studies like magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans can be used to further evaluate your headache.

### **TREATMENT FOR HEADACHES**

While you should always take the medications prescribed by your doctor, additional treatments can help keep the headache under control. Medication does not get to the root of the problem, as it only treats the symptoms and not the cause. While acetaminophen and ibuprofen may relieve some headaches, they are not the answer to chronic headache management. Some prescription medications are available that can prevent migraine headaches from occurring, but they do not work for some people.

The American Chiropractic Association suggests the following ideas to help prevent headaches:

- Take a break and stretch every 30 minutes to one hour if you spend a large amount of time in one fixed position, such as in front of a computer, typing or reading.
- Low-impact exercise may help relieve the pain associated with headaches. However, if you are prone to dull, throbbing headaches, avoid heavy exercise. Engage in such activities as walking and low-impact aerobics.
- Avoid teeth clenching. The upper teeth should never touch the lowers, except when swallowing. This results in stress at the temporomandibular joints (TMJ) – the two joints that connect your jaw to your skull – leading to TMJ irritation and a form of tension headaches.
- Drink at least eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day to help avoid dehydration, which can lead to headaches.

Massage and acupuncture are two types of treatments that can be helpful in treating headaches. A doctor of chiropractic or a physical therapist can give therapeutic stretching and strengthening exercises which can also help to relieve muscle tension and spasms in the neck.

Can you imagine having headaches a tenth as often as you do now or not at all? What if they were not nearly as intense if or when you did have them? And what if that relief lasted long after your treatment had ended? Research shows that those who received chiropractic spinal manipulation experienced a sustained therapeutic benefit in contrast with those patients who received a commonly prescribed medication. Spinal manipulation is a conservative therapy that is safe and effective for men and women of all ages.

Chiropractors perform spinal manipulation as their main treatment, but treatment by a chiropractic physician could involve therapeutic exercises, nutritional counseling, electric stimulation, ultrasound, advanced allergy testing, posture correction and/or a prescription for massage therapy. For those who have suffered with headaches for years, an evaluation by a doctor of chiropractic could lead to life without headaches.

Source: American Chiropractic Association - [www.acatoday.com](http://www.acatoday.com)

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