

EXPERIENCING Headaches?



If you have a headache, you're not alone. Nine out of ten North Americans suffer from headaches. Some are occasional, some frequent, some are dull and throbbing, and some cause debilitating pain and nausea.

What do you do when you suffer from a pounding headache? Do you grit your teeth and carry on? Lie down? Pop a pill and hope the pain goes away? There is a better alternative.

Research shows that spinal manipulation—the primary form of care provided by doctors of chiropractic—may be an effective treatment option for tension headaches and headaches that originate in the neck. A report released in 2001 by researchers at the Duke University Evidence-Based Practice Center in Durham, North Carolina, found that spinal manipulation resulted

in almost immediate improvement for those headaches that originate in the neck, and had significantly fewer side effects and longer-lasting relief of tension-type headache than do commonly prescribed medications.

Also, a 1995 study in the *Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics* found that spinal manipulative therapy is an effective treatment for tension headaches and that those who ceased chiropractic treatment after four weeks experienced a sustained therapeutic benefit in contrast with those patients who received a commonly prescribed medication.

Headache Triggers

But to get to the bottom of the problem, you first need to find out what is causing your pain. Headaches have many causes, or “triggers”. These may include foods; environmental stimuli such as noises, lights, and stress; and behaviors such as insomnia, excessive exercise, and blood sugar changes. About 5 percent of all headaches are warning signals caused by physical problems.

Primary headaches, such as tension, migraine, or cluster headaches, comprise 95 percent of all headaches. Primary headaches are not caused by disease. The headache itself is the primary concern.

What Can You Do?

- If you spend a large amount of time in one fixed position, such as in front of a computer, **take a break and stretch every thirty minutes to one hour**. The stretches should take your head and neck through a comfortable range of motion. Low-impact exercise may also help relieve the pain associated with primary headaches.
- **Focus on maintaining good posture**. Imagine that there's a string at the top of your head. Keep your head balanced over your shoulders and your back straight.
- **Avoid clenching your teeth**. The upper teeth should never touch the lowers, except when swallowing.
- **Drink at least eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day** to help avoid dehydration, which can lead to headaches.
- **Avoid caffeine**. Foods such as chocolate, coffee, sodas, and cocoa contain high levels of the stimulant.
- **Avoid drinking alcoholic beverages**. These drinks can dehydrate you and cause headache pain.

What Can a Doctor of Chiropractic Do?

Chiropractors may do one or more of the following if you suffer from a primary headache:

- **Perform spinal manipulation** or chiropractic adjustments to improve spinal function and alleviate the stress on your system.
- **Provide nutritional advice**, recommending a change in diet and perhaps the addition of B-complex vitamins.
- **Offer advice on posture, exercises, relaxation techniques, and ergonomics, or work postures**. This advice should help to relieve the recurring joint irritation and tension in the muscles of the neck and upper back.
- If your headache is symptomatic of a health problem that needs the care of another discipline, your doctor of chiropractic will **refer you to an appropriate specialist**.

Dr. Randall Trester is a chiropractor with a special emphasis in chronic pain, injury and rehabilitation, and is certified in pre- and post natal care. His passion is sharing the powerful effects that chiropractic care has on general health, athletic performance, and pregnancy. He has a family practice in Kitsilano at West 1st Chiropractic Wellness Centre, 3-1864 West 1st Avenue. Contact Dr. Trester at www.drRANDALLtrester.com or at rtrester@viewmagazine.ca.

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