

Headache Prevention and Treatment

Headache symptoms usually begin gradually. In fact, the sudden onset of severe headache may signify a serious problem and requires immediate medical attention. A typical headache is often described as achy, dull or throbbing pain. It typically begins at the base of the skull/upper part of the neck and may radiate into the eye(s), the temple, or other locations. Headaches may be felt on one or both sides of the head. Often loud noises or bright lights may make them worse. Some patients may become nauseated or experience odd smells, sounds, or sights before and during the headache attack.

How Is a Headache Evaluated?

Early diagnosis and treatment are important in identifying a serious underlying cause for your headache. In most cases, an in-depth history and physical examination can help determine if your symptoms are related to an easily treated problem, or if it is more serious. Your doctor or chiropractor can use tests that reproduce the symptoms of your headache to help develop a specific diagnosis and management plan for your condition, or refer you to another health care provider. X-rays, laboratory tests and even advanced imaging studies like magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) may be necessary.

What Is the Treatment for Headaches?

Doctors of chiropractic often treat patients with tension-type headaches and headaches caused by problems with the joints and muscles in the neck, as well. Joint manipulation of the neck and upper back, along with stretching and strengthening exercises, have been demonstrated to be effective in the treatment of this type of headache. More serious causes of headache require aggressive treatment, and your doctor of chiropractic can assist you in finding a medical headache specialist. The majority of patients with headache recover completely after treatment. Unfortunately, the recurrence rate is relatively high, particularly with tension-type headache.

What Causes Headaches?

Headaches can be primary or secondary. The most common type of primary headache is caused by problems with the neck muscles. Changes in the blood vessels inside the skull usually cause migraines. Other common types of headache include “cluster” headaches—headaches grouped together over weeks at a time; sinus headaches, associated with allergies and/or sinus infection; and headaches from poor vision.

Secondary headache results from some other cause or condition—head injury, concussion, blood vessel problems, or high blood pressure—or from side effects of some medications, infections in the head or sinuses or elsewhere in the body. Rare headache causes include tumors, aneurysms and other abnormal growths inside the skull, and toxic substances in the blood. Certain foods, such as monosodium glutamate (MSG), a food flavor enhancer, may cause headaches, as well.

How Can Headaches Be Prevented?

Muscle-tension headaches can often be avoided by maintaining proper posture and neck movements while performing your normal activities. You should:

- Avoid slouching or reading with your neck bent forward
- Keep your computer monitor at eye level
- Take frequent breaks from reading and working on the computer
- Stop smoking
- Have a spinal evaluation by a qualified chiropractor

Our office has been successful in treating many types of headaches without the use of drugs or surgery. If you or someone you know is suffering from headaches and have not found the relief you are looking for, please contact our office. We may be able to help you.

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