

Celebrate Wellness!

Headaches

Seven of every ten Americans will have a headache this year.ⁱ What causes headaches? What can you do to minimize the pain or even eliminate the cause? Here are some tips, courtesy of the Virginia Chiropractic Association.

Primary Headaches are not related to an underlying disease process such as stroke, cancer, drug reactions, etc. There are three main types: Migraine, Tension, and Cluster (see box). Secondary Headaches are caused by life-threatening and non-life-threatening underlying diseases. Secondary Headaches include infections, tumors, vascular (including aneurysm), drug-induced, or idiopathic (caused unknown).ⁱⁱⁱ Though life-threatening Secondary Headaches do occur, Primary Headaches are far more common. Doctors are trained to recognize the difference, and to refer for specialized diagnostic testing when appropriate.

There are many, many prescription and non-prescription medications used to treat or abort headaches. Unfortunately, some of these drugs have a variety of side effects including a surprising one: severe, persistent headaches. Doctors can't consistently predict who will have so-called Rebound Headaches, and the only definitive way to tell is to take medications and see what happens. Unsurprisingly, many people find that approach unacceptable.

Can headaches be treated or managed without drugs? For most people the answer is "yes." One approach is to manage triggers. Sulfites in wine, caffeine, tyramines in cheese, poor posture, even dehydration and faulty sleeping patterns are headache triggers in many people. Many people find relief from headaches, even migraines, through chiropractic care. Up to 50% of headaches may have a portion of their origin in the neck. Neck-based headaches are technically called cervicogenic. By manipulating the tissues and bones of the neck, doctors of chiropractic can decrease irritation to tissues that cause headaches... and the effect is powerful enough to rival or even out-perform many medications, without medication-induced Rebound Headaches. A 1995 study compared neck adjustments as commonly performed by doctors of chiropractic to the drug Amitriptyline, a pill used to treat headache as well as depression. The study concluded that not only were neck adjustments "an effective treatment for tension headaches," but also that the effects tend to last longer and "decreased need for over-the-counter medication..."^{iv}

Those are "side effects" that any headache sufferer will very much appreciate.

Primary Headache Typesⁱⁱ

- 1. Migraine:** "A symptom complex occurring periodically and characterized by pain in the head (usually unilateral), vertigo, nausea and vomiting, phonophobia [aversion to noise], and scintillating appearances of light. Classified as classic migraine, common migraine, cluster headache, hemiplegic migraine, ophthalmoplegic migraine, and ophthalmic migraine."
- 2. Tension:** "headache associated with nervous tension, anxiety, etc., often related to chronic contraction of the scalp muscles. See Also: posttraumatic neck syndrome Syn: tension-type headache, muscle contraction headache."
- 3. Cluster:** "possibly due to a hypersensitivity to histamine; characterized by recurrent, severe, unilateral [one-sided] orbitotemporal [around the eye and temples] headaches associated with ipsilateral photophobia [one-sided aversion to bright light], lacrimation [crying/weepy eye], and nasal congestion."



Celebrate Wellness! is provided as a public service by the Virginia Chiropractic Association, PO Box 15, Afton, VA 22920, Phone 540-932-3100,

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i American College of Family Physicians, as posted at http://www.acponline.org/patients_families/diseases_conditions/headaches/

ii Stedman's Medical Dictionary, 27th Edition

iii http://www.guideline.gov/summary/summary.aspx?doc_id=6111

iv Spinal manipulation vs. amitriptyline for the treatment of chronic tension-type headaches: a randomized clinical trial. J Manipulative Physiol Ther. 1995 Mar-Apr;18(3):148-54.