

# Headaches

outlined and explained to you. Chiropractic is a form of care that uses several means of treatment to reach the desired result.

Treatment may include spinal adjustment (also called manipulation) to improve spinal alignment; physical modalities such as application of heat or ice, electric muscle stimulation, ultrasound, massage, or others may be used; and specific recommendations to improve your diet, exercise, posture, or sleeping habits will be discussed as they affect your headache frequency. Relaxation techniques may also be discussed.

## *The Prevention*

Once your Doctor of Chiropractic has determined the cause(s) of your headaches, you will know how to avoid them in the future. For example, if it is found that your headaches tend to occur following a late lunch, future care to eat at regular intervals will prevent at least some of your headaches.

Follow all recommended changes to lifestyle (such as improvements in diet, nutrition, exercise, and posture) and keep all health care appointments. The bottom line is that they are *your* headaches—you can be the one to control them.

For a complete list of references, please go to [www.fcer.org/Reference/8706A.htm](http://www.fcer.org/Reference/8706A.htm)

**The list of possible headache triggers is extensive. Some of the more common culprits are:**

- ❖ chocolate
- ❖ caffeine
- ❖ food additives, such as:  
monosodium glutamate (MSG)  
or nitrates
- ❖ alcohol
- ❖ stress or anxiety
- ❖ hormonal changes associated  
with puberty, menstruation,  
pregnancy, and menopause
- ❖ changes in altitude, time zone,  
meal times, or sleep.

*Compliments of your Doctor of Chiropractic*

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**I**t is estimated that 90% of men and 95% of women had at least one headache last year.<sup>1</sup> Studies have also suggested that despite this large number of headaches, about half of sufferers fail to seek treatment.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, this means that a large portion of those with headaches are either suffering needlessly or they are self-treating with medications—neither of these “solutions” addresses the cause(s) of the headaches and, therefore, there is no prevention of future pain. This is not control. To take control of your headaches, seek care from your Doctor of Chiropractic.

True control will require your active participation in three easy steps:

- ◆ diagnosis
- ◆ treatment
- ◆ prevention

### **The Diagnosis**

Diagnosis in your chiropractor's office will begin with thorough physical and spinal examinations, and, if clinically necessary, diagnostic tests (which may include X-rays, and the ordering of neurological, orthopedic, blood, and/or urine laboratory tests). In addition, be prepared for in depth discussion and questioning about your diet, health history, headache frequency and severity, accident history, habits and activities, and other factors that may play a role in causing your headaches. Keeping a daily diary will help you remember factors that may influence your headaches and will ensure a more accurate determination of factors that may precipitate your headaches.

The first determination will be whether your headache is *secondary or primary*. Secondary headaches are those caused by another physical condition—and these are the ones that people worry about with a severe

headache. Fortunately, these account for less than 10% of all headaches. That said, however, if your headache comes on suddenly, is accompanied by numbness, confusion, slurred speech, or other severe or unusual symptom(s), **SEEK EMERGENCY CARE.**

- ◆ Primary headaches include tension-type, migraine, and cervicogenic headache.
- ◆ Tension-type headaches, sometimes called muscle contraction, are by far the most common type, accounting for an estimated 85% of all head pain. Men and women suffer from tension headaches at equal rates. Pain is generally mild to moderate, can last for a few hours to a full day, and is usually felt in the back of the neck and on the scalp. They may be caused by stress and can become chronic, with some people suffering daily headaches.
- ◆ Migraine headaches are notorious for their severity and potential for unusual symptoms. Women are more likely to suffer from migraines than men, although before puberty and after menopause, males and females suffer at approximately equal rates. Migraines may run in families and can, therefore, affect children. The American Council for Headache Education (ACHE) believes that “if one parent has migraine, the child has a 50 percent chance of having migraine. If both parents have them, there is a 75 percent chance that the child will have them, too.”<sup>1</sup>  
Migraine pain is often severe and disabling, affecting work, family, and social lives. There are two types of migraine—those with aura and those without. Both types are characterized by throbbing pain, typically on one side of

the head (pain may alternate sides); nausea and vomiting, and light and sound sensitivity. Migraine with aura also includes visual disturbances (the “aura”) such as jagged lines or flashing lights in the visual field, blind spots, or even visual or auditory hallucinations. Disruptions in smell, taste, and touch may also be experienced.

- ◆ Cervicogenic headaches are those caused by aberrations in the structures of the neck, including the joints, ligaments, muscles, or cervical spinal discs. In fact, cervicogenic means originating in the neck. Symptoms of cervicogenic headache can mimic both tension and migraine headache.

Fortunately, your Doctor of Chiropractic can differentiate between the types of headache and their causes. Research has shown that chiropractic management of these types of headache is effective and safe.<sup>3-5</sup> Some research suggests that not seeking treatment for chronic headaches can lead to psychiatric disorders, such as depression.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, it is important to go beyond diagnosis and follow up with the appropriate treatment.

### **The Treatment**

Only after a diagnosis of your headache type and the determination of its causes will chiropractic treatment begin—if it is determined that chiropractic is the form of care most appropriate for your case. If it is found that another type of treatment would be beneficial, you will be referred to the most suitable health care provider.

If chiropractic care will best meet your needs, treatment will begin after it is first