

MIGRAINE HEADACHE

Migraines are an increasingly common and debilitating cause for headache complaints. More serious causes for headache must be ruled out to establish a diagnosis of migraine. Chiropractors are trained to diagnose and refer a patient immediately if a serious medical problem is suspected.

Causes: The specific cause of migraines is still uncertain. However, some triggers have been identified and include menstruation, chocolate, and aspartame. Other causes are presently being investigated.

Symptoms: According to the Headache Classification Committee, migraines have the following characteristics: one-sided, pulsating, moderate or severe intensity, and are often aggravated by physical activity. Nausea, vomiting, and light/sound sensitivity are often noted. There may or not be an “aura” – which refers to visual disturbances, pins/needles sensation, numbness, weakness, speech difficulty, and facial muscular dysfunction.

Examples: *Common migraine, classical migraine*

How our experts can help:

As mentioned, migraine headaches are not yet fully understood, and the most appropriate treatment regime is often unclear. However, there have been several recent medical studies, which suggest that chiropractic care can be beneficial in managing the condition. The treatment options may include:

- Patient education and reassurance
- Manipulation or mobilization of associated joints
- Soft tissue therapy of surrounding musculature
- Rehabilitation and exercise prescription
- Ergonomic and lifestyle changes
- Referral and co-management with medical doctor

* This treatment would be in addition to standard medical care, which may include pharmaceuticals, cognitive behavioral therapy and lifestyle modifications etc.

** Patients most likely to respond include those with limited passive neck movement, abnormal tenderness to the sub-occipital area at the base of the skull, and neck pain before or at the onset of migraine.

* Most headaches are non-life threatening, however it is advisable to seek the opinion of your Medical Doctor or Neurologist if you develop sudden or severe symptoms, especially if these are different from previous occurrences. Concerning symptoms include severe sudden onset of headache, progressively worsening headaches over time, headaches accompanied with fever/chills/rash and extremely stiff neck, headache after head injury, problems with vision or profound dizziness.

CERVICOGENIC HEADACHE

According to the International Headache Society, cervicogenic headache is described as pain referring from a source in the neck, and perceived in one or more regions of the head and/or face. Chiropractors are trained to diagnose and refer a patient immediately if a serious medical problem is suspected.

Causes: Awkward and sustained neck postural positions may be a contributing factor. Upper-crossed syndrome, which is characterized by forward migration of the head and neck in relation to the torso, has been identified as a likely cause. Specific causes remain unclear at this stage.

Symptoms: Headache associated with neck pain and stiffness. These headaches are typically one-sided, start from one side of the back of the head and neck, migrate to the front of the head, and may cause discomfort into the arm on the same side. Neck pain precedes or co-exists with the headache. Radiological testing, such as x-ray, is typically normal.

How our experts can help:

Well-established evidence exists to support the use of chiropractic treatment in the management of cervicogenic headache. The treatment options may include:

- Patient education and reassurance
- Manipulation or mobilization of the cervical spine (neck), with manipulation demonstrating more effectiveness
- Soft tissue therapy of surrounding musculature
- Rehabilitation and exercise prescription
- Modalities including electrical stimulation (TENS) and cryotherapy (ice)
- Ergonomic and lifestyle changes
- Referral and co-management with medical doctor, however patients with cervicogenic headache do not generally respond well to medications and pharmaceuticals.

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** Concerning symptoms include severe sudden onset of headache, progressively worsening headaches over time, headaches accompanied with fever/chills/rash and extremely stiff neck, headache after head injury, problems with vision or profound dizziness.