

Do you have a headache? Most of us have experienced a headache at one time or another. The most common form of headache is the tension headache. They can be caused by stress, diet, spinal misalignment, anxiety, or depression.

If you don't sleep enough, sleep poorly, skip meals or use alcohol you are more likely to get a tension headache. They usually begin at the base of the skull or upper neck and radiate around the head. These headaches are due to tight muscles in your neck, shoulders, or jaw. When they are due to tightness in the neck and shoulders they are also known as cervicogenic headaches. This type of headache can go away in a few hours or can last for days.

Other types of headaches include cluster headaches, sinus headaches, and migraines. Cluster headaches are one of the rarest forms of headaches and its cause is unknown. Caused by vascular changes in the head, cluster headaches start suddenly, are one sided, and may last from a few minutes to a few hours. Usually the sufferer will have three to four headaches per day and the cluster period can last for several months. These headaches appear to be closely related to the autonomic nervous system. It is this division of the nervous system that causes many of the health improvements seen with chiropractic manipulation.

Sinus headaches are caused by swelling in the linings of the sinuses. They occur because of either inflammation or infection of the sinuses. Cigarette smoking and exposure to allergens can significantly increase your risk of a headache. Keeping your hands clean and away from your face can reduce the likelihood of developing an infection. Sleeping with your head slightly elevated will assist in sinus drainage. Staying well hydrated by drinking lots of water will encourage good sinus drainage and decrease your risk of congestion.

Migraine headaches can be very disabling. Three times as many women suffer from migraines as men. They are extremely painful and pounding with the sufferer experiencing extremely sensitivity to light or sound. They may experience nausea or vomiting. Migraines are often preceded by a "prodrome." This can include seeing flashing lights, zig-zag lines in their field of vision, or even temporary blindness. While many sufferers of migraine headache take medications, others opt for non-pharmaceutical therapies including massage, stress and tension relief, biofeedback, and chiropractic manipulation. Diet can have a significant impact on migraine headaches. Maintaining a healthy blood sugar level, reducing caffeine, red wines, and chocolate, have all helped some sufferers of migraine headache.

Other causes of headache include trauma to the head. If you ever have a headache that develops after a head trauma you should immediately have it evaluated. Closed head injuries can cause significant and permanent damage to the brain. The Sports Concussion Institute estimates that one in ten athletes involved in contact sports will experience a concussion. Some of the signs of concussion include dizziness, headache, nausea, fogginess, sensitivity to light and sound, sleepiness, and concentration difficulties. This has been a hot topic in the sports medicine world and even the NFL is now taking steps to

better evaluate its players' safety after concussion. If you or your children ever have headache after a contact sports event, you should have an evaluation for concussion performed.

Other serious conditions such as brain tumors can cause headache. While headache is a common early sign of brain tumors or other space occupying lesions in the brain, it is usually accompanied by other neurological symptoms such as personality change or seizure. Headaches caused by brain tumors are a very small percentage of the overall number of headaches. If a headache is brought on by exertion, such as after running, coughing, sneezing, or a bowel movement, you should be evaluated by a professional to assure that there is no brain tumor.

Regardless of the cause, headaches can be painful and incapacitating. Tension headaches are often immediately relieved with chiropractic manipulation. Sufferers of migraine, cluster, and sinus headaches also often experience significant relief with manipulation. An ice pack applied to the forehead or the base of the skull or placing a rolled towel under your neck while lying on your back will also provide some relief. Relaxing and avoiding stress and noise are also beneficial.

While most headaches are of the tension variety and respond well to conservative approaches, if your headache persists, worsens, or is accompanied by any neurological symptoms you should immediately have it evaluated by a health care professional. Maintaining good health in general, correct posture, and reducing your stress and anxiety can go a long way towards preventing a headache.

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