

# **HEADACHES**

By Dr. Heath Schipp

If you have had a headache after all the stresses of the day, you're not alone. Nine out of ten Americans suffer from headaches. Headaches can be dull, throbbing, stabbing, nauseating, and downright debilitating. If there was only one type of headache, then treatment would be much easier, however this is not the case. Headaches come in many shapes and sizes with no simple answers.

Headaches can have many "triggers" or causing agents. These include: food, loud noises, bright lights, stress, too much or too little sleep, exercise, blood pressure, alcohol, and hormonal changes. Misalignment of the bones in the neck and upper back is another overlooked problem. When these bones move out of their normal position, the nerves and blood vessels that go to the head are affected, and a headache can be triggered.

## **What type of headache do I have?**

Tension headaches are the most common headache in the United States. Tension headaches involve pain or discomfort in the head, scalp, or neck, usually associated with muscle tightness in these areas. The headache sufferer usually has a dull, achy pain on one or both sides of their head. They can occur at any age, but are most common in adults and adolescents. If a headache occurs two or more times weekly for several months or longer, the condition is considered chronic. Tension headaches result from the contraction of neck and scalp muscles. One cause of this muscle contraction is a response to stress, depression, or anxiety. Any activity that causes the head to be held in one position for a long time without moving can cause this headache. Such activities including typing or using computers, fine work with the hands, and the use of a microscope. Sleeping in a cold room or sleeping with the neck in an abnormal position can also trigger this type of headache.

Vascular headache is the category that includes migraines and cluster headaches. These headaches have intense stabbing and throbbing pain, which occurs because the blood vessels to the head and neck rapidly dilate. Migraine sufferers can be debilitated because of the nausea, dizziness, vomiting, fatigue, and vertigo that commonly accompany the headaches. Migraines generally last from hours to a few days. Cluster headaches have similar symptoms but occur in clusters. The symptoms last from minutes to hours, but the headaches occur up to eight times a day and can last for many days.

Vertebrogenic headaches are caused by problems in the neck and are felt in the head, neck, and face. Their pains are generally dull and achy. Many causes include trauma to the neck, arthritis, and poor posture which causes irritation to the vertebral nerve roots. The pain is commonly associated with muscle tension in the neck, which brings on tension headaches.

## **What can you do?**

Follow these suggestions from the ACA:

- If you spend a large amount of time in one fixed position, such as in front of a computer, on a sewing machine, typing or reading, take a break and stretch for a few minutes to one hour. The stretches should take your head and neck through their comfortable range of motion.

- Low-impact exercise may help relieve the pain associated with primary headaches. However, if you are prone to dull throbbing headaches, avoid heavy exercising and concentrate on activities such as walking and low-impact aerobics.
- Avoid teeth clenching. The upper teeth should never touch the lowers, except when swallowing. This results in stress at the temporomandibular joints (TMJ) - these are the joints that connect your jaw to your skull which leads to TMJ irritation and tension headaches.
- Drink at least eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day to help avoid dehydration that can lead to headaches.
- Avoid caffeine. Foods such as chocolate, coffee, sodas, and cocoa contain forms of this stimulant.
- Avoid foods with a high salt or sugar content. These foods may cause migraines resulting in sensitivity to light, noise, or abrupt movements.
- Avoid drinking alcoholic beverages. These drinks can dehydrate you and cause headache pain.
- Other headache sufferers may want to avoid not only caffeine, but also high fat foods, dairy products, red meat, and salty foods.

These suggestions should help you get through the minor headache. Please consult your chiropractor if headaches persist because chiropractic has had excellent results with patients with headaches.