

Headaches

101



Therapeutic Massage by Lucy

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Recurring headache may be the most common reason for seeking medical care. Numerous visits are made annually to doctors, chiropractors, massage therapists, hypnotists, acupuncturist, and other alternative and health care providers who may offer headache relief. With so many people affected by them, researchers still haven't unraveled all the mysteries of headaches. It can be difficult to diagnose just what kind of a headache an individual has, or prescribe the proper medication. There are numerous descriptors given to specify what the pain is: tension headache, migraine, cluster headache, sinus, etc. For many, the pain of headaches can be a debilitating experience that impacts every aspect of their lives. Headaches can last for days at a time. They can be frightening as well as incapacitating. Insomnia is a frequent common complaint, as is fatigue. People can become quite desperate seeking relief and help from any place they can find. Help is available, just not always easy to find.

The primary difference between episodic and chronic headaches is headache frequency and severity of some symptoms.



Types of Headaches 🤔

In 1988, the International Headache Society (IHS) developed the criteria most often used to differentiate these headaches from one another. Physicians from around the world worked to come up with a classification system, based on symptoms. This criteria includes:

Number of attacks per month
Pain characteristics
Length of time per attack
Accompanying symptoms

This system actually didn't help with diagnosing which headache was occurring because so many headaches have similar characteristics. The Headache Society even admits that its criteria have substantial diagnostic overlap. This is true for chronic tension headaches, migraines, and those attributable to stress, depression, fatigue, and underlying physical or disease conditions that are unknown as the culprit. Chronic tension type headaches occur with men & women both. They affect every personality type, and generally begin between the ages of 20 and 40. Other types, such as a cluster headache, posttraumatic headache, and disease-related headache are not quite as confusing as the others, because they have more distinct characteristics.



*More than 90 percent of headaches can be classified as tension-type, cervicogenic or migraine.

Tension Headaches 😬

By far, most people get tension-type headaches and get them frequently. They typically suffer mild to moderate pain, on both sides of the head, that is often described as tight, stiff, constricting - like having something wrapped around your head and pressing tightly. Certain positions seem to provide some relief. Stress accounts for a large percentage of headache triggers. Chronic tension-type headaches may be the result of stress or fatigue, but more than likely, they can be attributed to physical problems, psychological issues, or depression. Tension-type headaches result when muscles in the neck, shoulders and head tense up, limiting blood flow to the area and building up waste products in the tissues. The end result: pain. Myofascia can be very tight putting strain on the cranium, muscles and skeletal system, or it can be twisted. Massage and neuromuscular therapy can help with releasing tissues, and postural imbalances.

Cervicogenic Headaches 🤔

Cervicogenic headache is a musculoskeletal form of tension-type headache (which may also be related to migraines). Many times, a cervicogenic headache goes undiagnosed, as this is a relatively new classification. Cervical vertebrae can become out of alignment or rotated. This may be post-injury (like whiplash), or repetitive motions or positioning rotate or pull vertebrae in the wrong direction. Sleeping positions may be responsible. Muscles can become short and tight, putting tension on the spine, or cause it to become out of alignment.

The problem can originate from your anterior or posterior neck, or numerous postural-type muscles. Bulging discs may be an issue too, or result from the misalignment. Other levels of spinal misalignment, from the cervical down to the sacrum can cause symptomatic headaches.

Allergy related Headaches 🤔

You may be sensitive to, or allergic to any number of things. Your body's allergic response could be in the form of a headache. Not all allergic symptoms are hives, stuffy nose, or anaphylaxis (happens with certain drugs like penicillin or bee stings). Looking at your environment, animals, what you eat, perfumes or colognes, molds/fungus, toxic or chemical irritants in your home, or other places you frequent, could shed light on the culprit. A recent addition to this category is high ozone levels. Many people are allergic to certain alcohol beverages and never know it. Food and your everyday diet can hold many keys. The answer to your headaches could be as simple as what you eat. Pay attention and read labels. Food additives such as MSG, nitrites, yellow food coloring and nitrates should be avoided, as well as red wines, aged cheeses, processed meats, citrus fruits, chocolate, pickled foods, and peanuts. See if there is a pattern you can figure out. An allergy specialist doctor can perform allergy testing to help verify the specific antagonists. These can then be avoided, or treated with anti-allergy medications.



Migraines 🤔

Migraine is considered a vascular headache because it is associated with changes in the size of the arteries in and outside of the brain. Due to biochemical changes in the brain, the trigeminal nerve in your head triggers a chain reaction. Changes in serotonin in the blood vessels and the brain lead to shifts of blood flow, bypassing the capillaries and going through shunts to the veins. These distended vessels contribute to the distinctive pain of a migraine.

Migraines are periodic severe, throbbing headaches that happen to a fewer number of people (more women than men), usually with pain one side of the head, nausea and vomiting, can cause loss of appetite, sensitivity to light and noise, and visual changes, called an aura, are often reported. There are several types of migraine, all share basic features, and each person will suffer this headache in a unique way. Generally, however, migraine often begins as a dull ache and then develops into a constant, throbbing and pulsating pain that you may feel at the temples, as well as the front or back of one side of the head. Frequently, a trigger is responsible for a migraine onset. These could be just about anything, including sounds, smells, and bright lights. Changes in sleep patterns — getting too much or too little — can trigger migraines in some people. The two most prevalent types of migraine are migraine with aura (formerly referred to as classic migraine) and migraine without aura (formerly referred to as common migraine). Feverfew and Ginger are used by some as a preventative.



Cluster Headaches 🤖

The cluster headache was once considered a type of migraine, because it is vascular. Unfortunately, it is possible for a person to suffer from both migraines and clusters, although it is rare. Cluster headaches got their name because the attacks come in groups. The pain arrives without warning, has been described as the most severe and intense of any headache type. It generally lasts from 30 to 45 minutes, although it might persist for several hours before it disappears. Unfortunately, it can reoccur later in the day. Most sufferers experience one to four headaches a day during a cluster period.

Cluster headaches frequently occur during the morning or late at night; the cluster cycle can last weeks or months and then can disappear for months or years. Clusters often occur during spring or autumn and, thus, are often incorrectly associated with allergies. Approximately 10 percent of the sufferers, however, experience chronic cluster headaches that occur all year long.

The headache is usually unilateral and almost always affects the same side; it rarely switches sides from one attack to another. You might feel the pain begin around one eye, "like a nail or knife stabbing or piercing" your eye, or as if someone "were pulling out" your eye; it may be accompanied by a tearing or bloodshot eye and a runny nose on the side of the headache. It can radiate from the eye to the forehead, temple and cheek on the same side. The pain of a cluster headache has been described as piercing, burning, throbbing, pulsating, and so excruciating that most victims cannot sit still and feel compelled to

rock in a chair, walk back and forth, or bang their heads against something. A smaller percent of the populous are victims to cluster headaches and they encounter them somewhere between the ages of 20 and 45. More men (about five to one) than women suffer from cluster headaches.

Organic headaches 🤖

An organic headache is the result of an abnormality in the brain or skull. The cause may be from a benign or malignant brain tumor, a brain aneurysm, hematoma, meningitis, brain abscess, brain infection, cerebral hemorrhage, or encephalitis.

Fortunately, very few headaches (less than 5 percent) are caused by tumors, and not all people with tumors experience headaches. A tumor will cause a headache if it intrudes on arterial space or increases intracranial pressure. If there is a brain tumor, the headache will probably come on suddenly and intensely. It may get progressively worse and can be aggravated by coughing or physical activity. Seeing 'lights' or visual phenomena may occur. Be aware of symptoms that could be a warning: a sudden, sharp, intense or severe pain (especially if you never or only occasionally get a headache), a sudden lack of balance or falling, change in libido, dizziness, confusion or disorientation, inappropriate behavior; labile emotions, difficulty speaking, change in appetite, vivid dreams, or heightened intuition. If these symptoms are left unevaluated and undiagnosed, there could be serious repercussions. 🤖

Rebound Headaches 🤔

Almost anyone suffering from daily headaches has experienced rebound headaches. Rebound headaches are induced by medications (usually). They develop from daily or near-daily use or overuse of pain medications. Both over-the-counter and prescription medicines are culprits for rebound headaches. There are common-assumed to be safe-ingredients in pain medications, such as Tylenol and aspirin that can cause headaches. This is especially true if the drug contains caffeine, which many analgesic and headache pills contain. People who also drink a lot of beverages that contain caffeine are candidates for rebound headaches. These drinks include cola, coffee, or tea. The pain often feels like a dull, achy tight band around your forehead. Mild dizziness may be present. It becomes more severe as the pain medicine wears off. These headaches usually occur more in the mornings. Drinking water helps flush the offender out of the body. The common hangover is also a form of rebound headache.

Sinus Headaches 🤔

Sinuses are located in your forehead bone, the cheekbone on each side, and behind the bridge of your nose, between and just over eyebrows. Sinuses may become inflamed, usually due to hayfever/allergies, infection, and tumors. This inflammatory process results in pain. Sinuses are filled with air, and their secretions need to drain freely into the nose. Fever often accompanies an infection, which causes a blockage. This can be confirmed by xrays. Treatment might include antibiotics, antihistamines, or

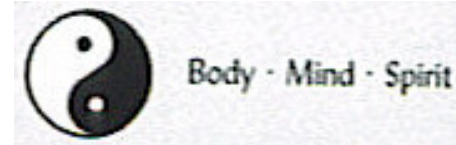
decongestants. When a sinus becomes inflamed, usually as the result of an allergic reaction, a tumor or an infection, the inflammation will cause a localized pain. Sinuses are filled with air, and their secretions must be able to drain freely into the nose. If your headache is truly caused by a sinus blockage, such as an infection, you will probably have a fever. An x-ray will confirm a sinus blockage. Your physician's treatment might include antibiotics for the infection, as well as antihistamines or decongestants. Allergy testing may be helpful. Sinus pain is often described as a pressure between the eyebrows. Ear swelling and blockage may accompany sinusitis.

Massage and acupressure or acupuncture might provide some relief. If you do not have a true sinus headache and take decongestants, for example, they could make your headache worse. They can also over-dry your sinuses, causing discomfort, dry mouth, and nose bleeds. Saline nasal sprays may be soothing. Ear drops, massaging the ear, or ear candling may be helpful for ear-symptoms.

Vitamin/Nutrition Deficiency Headaches 🤔

Vitamins are necessary for the body being able to function efficiently, just like a car needs gas and oil. With all the commercially prepared foods people eat, many nutrients are absent or cooked out of them. Fast foods don't help, but everybody is 'in a hurry'. Supplemental vitamins and minerals can make a huge difference. Various research has been done on the effects of vitamins, minerals, and herbs, as well as effects from their deficiencies. Headaches can be a signal of inadequate amounts of many of them. Magnesium deficiency has been identified as a cause of

muscle cramping as well as headaches. Vitamin C performs numerous functions in the body, helps keep immunity up, and promotes healing. The B-vitamin group is crucial to basic bodily functions and healthy tissues, and is related to a number of disease conditions—and headaches. Vitamin E is an anti-oxidant that prevents the fats and fat-soluble Vitamin A stored in the body from breaking down and combining with other substances that may be harmful to the body. It also protects red blood cells from rupturing. Calcium performs numerous vital functions in the body. It combines with phosphorus to strengthen bones and is crucial for nerve conduction, muscle contraction and heartbeat. Calcium also helps prevent cramps brought on by exercise. Magnesium is essential for major biological processes. It is necessary for many enzymatic reactions and is vital for calcium metabolism. Boron enhances the body's ability to absorb calcium and magnesium. It aides in promoting beneficial levels of estrogen and testosterone in healthy post-menopausal women, and helps convert vitamin D to its active form for supporting the absorption of calcium. Potassium is necessary for the transmission of nerve impulses that provide smooth coordinated muscle movement. Potassium also helps widen the blood vessels during exercise, thereby increasing blood flow to help carry away heat, and it is used to convert blood glucose to glycogen. Many other nutrient deficiencies can also have adverse symptoms in the body—including headaches. There are many vitamin-mineral-homeopathic-herbal reference sources to read for help in this area as well as naturopaths.

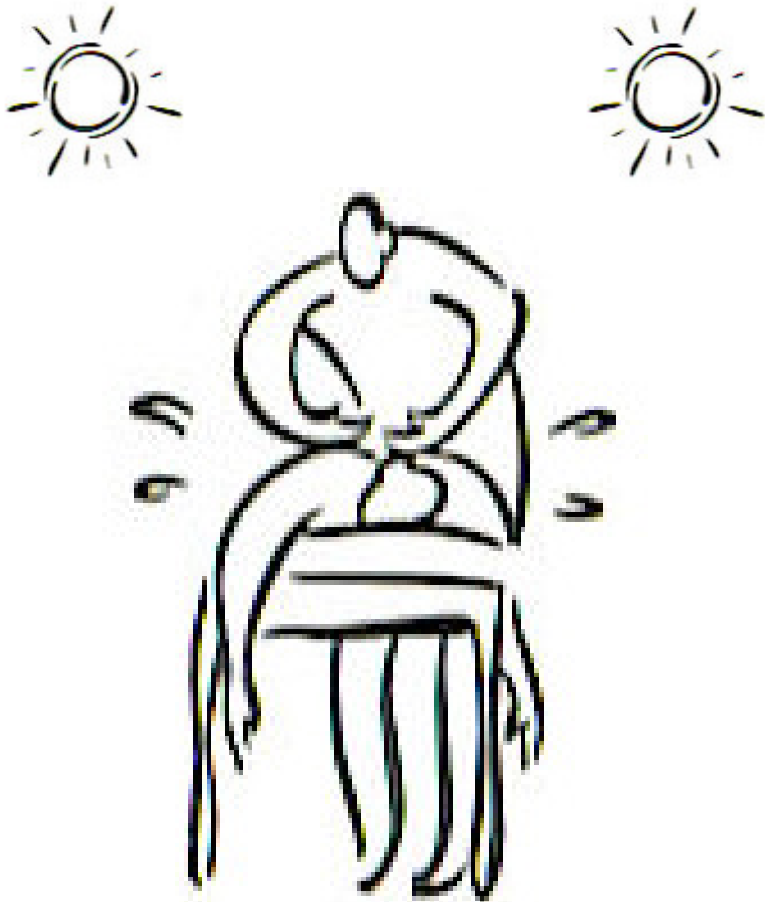


Oriental medicine offers a different approach to the problem. This approach evaluates a person by different categories, evaluations, and tests—very different than western medicine. This system looks at the whole being (mind-body-spirit) for sources of the headaches, and treats the issue the same. Treatment might include herbal supplements, hot teas, acupuncture/acupressure, colonics, chakra clearing and balancing, massage therapies, flexibility exercises—such as practicing yoga and getting Thai massage, meditation, short fasts to detoxify, deep breathing practices, and dietary /fluid balancing.



There are other categories of headaches—too many to list here. But headaches—regardless of their classification, plague millions of people everyday. But, there are things that can be done to help them. Medical evaluation is always a smart thing to do, to rule out serious problems, as headaches may only be a symptom of an unknown-to-you condition. It is always a relief to be reassured that your situation is NOT serious too! Doctors may prescribe medications. Some headaches can only be relieved by prescription drugs. It takes evaluation to determine this. Headaches caused by stress or structural and alignment imbalances may require different treatment.

Help for these can be received through neuromuscular therapy massage and chiropractic care. Getting your muscles and bones back where they are supposed to be can provide headache relief, as well as help other physical issues you may be having. Pain is generally a defense mechanism to let you know something is wrong. Listen to your body and take care of it.



Ten tips for reducing your headache risk:

1. Identify your triggers. Keep track of your headaches in a headache diary, noting what you ate that day, what the weather was like, where you were, etc., to identify patterns. Once you know what triggers your headaches you can take steps to avoid them.
2. Reduce your stress. While avoiding stress completely is impossible, reducing its effects is not. Learn about biofeedback, purchase and play relaxation tapes, take long baths, get a massage — all things that can minimize the effects of stress on your body.
3. Stop smoking. Smoking is a risk factor for several kinds of headaches. Even breathing cigarette or cigar smoke can trigger a headache for some people.
4. Avoid too many OTC medications. If you take the maximum dosage of over-the-counter pain relievers for your headaches more than two or three times a week, you should talk to your doctor. Eventually, these medications will fail to relieve your pain. What's more, they can cause rebound headaches, which begin when the medication wears off.
5. Limit alcohol. If you drink, limit your intake to an occasional drink or two. Beer and red wine are particular headache triggers for many people.
6. Get regular sleep. Maintaining regular sleep habits (going to bed and getting up at the same time, even on weekends) is particularly important for migraine

sufferers. Oversleeping can be a migraine trigger. Similarly, fatigue can cause tension headaches.

7. Eat regular meals. Missing a meal can trigger headaches for many. Eating a healthy diet rich in carbohydrates and low in fat and drinking plenty of water to keep well hydrated are also important.
8. Exercise regularly. Regular exercise, whether it's walking the dog or parking a distance from the mall, is an important stress reducer. Start gradually: a rigorous aerobic workout can induce headache if you haven't warmed up or aren't used to exercise.
9. Have your eyes checked. Staring at a computer screen all day can cause eyestrain, which can lead to tension-type headaches. Some people invest in a pair of glasses that provide optimal vision at the distance from the screen.
10. Sit up straight. Notice how you cradle the phone on your shoulder, how you carry your purse, how you sit behind the wheel of your car. Each of these can put undo strain on neck and shoulder muscles, leading to tension-type headaches.
 - Tips by Rita Mullen/Discovery Communications Inc.



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