

HELP, MY HEAD IS EXPLODING!

CERVICAL HEADACHES

Headache is the third highest occurring symptom that people seek medical attention for. It can range from mild discomfort in the head, scalp or neck to a stabbing, pulsating pain that resembles a power drill in action. The causes vary, and can span the gamut of periodic tension/migraine headache to life-threatening pathology like brain tumour.

People who spend hours on the computer are probably familiar with a non-life-threatening form of headache called the cervicogenic headache, which arises from inputs from the cervical (neck) spine complex.

CERVICAL SPINE COMPLEX

The cervix refers to the area where the base of the skull and the spinal vertebra meet. There are two joints that enable the nodding and turning actions of the head. These joints can become dysfunctional – for example, when they are strained, misaligned or degenerated – and cause pain. The dysfunction will in turn lead to tender points and/or painful muscles in the head, neck and upper shoulders, giving rise to headache, stiff neck and shoulders.

There are two main branches of nerves – the greater and lesser occipital nerves – which exit the joints between the skull and upper cervical spine. When these nerves are irritated, patients will feel a “line-like” headache from



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“DYSFUNCTIONAL JOINTS CAN LEAD TO PAINFUL MUSCLES IN THE HEAD, NECK AND UPPER SHOULDERS, AND CAUSE HEADACHES.”

the back to the front of the head. Cervicogenic headache sufferers may also experience pain or pressure behind the eyeball, a pain which has been described as having the eyeball squeezed from the inside.

Why do our body structures malfunction and cause cervicogenic headache? There are three main reasons:

- 1 **Trauma** Direct trauma like whiplash-related injuries, poor jaw movement or biomechanics can cause trauma to the tissues around the affected areas.
- 2 **Age** Age-related structural changes affect joint shapes and discs, resulting in strain to the neck and skull base areas, thus causing pain.
- 3 **Adaptive changes** These refer to indirect trauma to the structures due to poor posture, weak movement control, muscles being too long/short or too strong/weak.

More often than not, all the three factors are involved to cause cervicogenic headache.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Manual therapy, a hands-on approach which ascertains the source and cause of the symptoms before treatment is given, works on the basis that the body can heal itself. It therefore seeks to:

- 1 **Improve and optimise the structures environment for the body to self-heal** Adjustments to the spine by manipulation, muscle and fasciae releases are two of the many possible manual therapy techniques that can be prescribed.
- 2 **Improve muscle function by changing posture, control and achieving “good” length** Patients are actively involved in the healing process through practice of specific, prescribed exercises.
- 3 **Correct the mobility of nerves around the neck, face and head areas through nerve techniques**

With various treatment options available, it is possible to get rid of that disruptive, perennial, chronic headache. Play an active part in your own healing process, and make headache a thing of the past. **CPA**

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