

Oooh, My Aching...Head!

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Headaches affect millions of people everyday. Unfortunately, the majority of these headache sufferers have never received a formal diagnostic evaluation or treatment of their headaches, even though there are now highly effective treatments available. One of those treatments can be from a licensed physical therapist or chiropractor.

Headaches can be triggered by a number of factors including stress, physical trauma to the neck, head, or shoulders, certain foods, odors, hormonal and weather changes, and the big one is our posture. Emotional factors such as depression, anxiety, frustration, letdown, or even pleasant excitement may be associated with developing a headache.

What you should know about headaches:

Primary Headaches include tension type, migraine, and cluster headaches and are not caused by other underlying medical conditions. More than 90% of headaches are this type. Secondary headaches result from other medical conditions such as infection of increased pressure in the skull due to a tumor or other abnormality. These account for fewer than 10% of all headaches.

So what should you do if you are experiencing frequent headaches (4-5 or more times a week)? Schedule an appointment specifically for a headache evaluation. When headache is discussed during an office visit, there may not be enough time or attention to properly assess the headache.

Healthcare practitioners need to know specific information about pain location, character, onset, frequency, severity, prescriptions, past treatments, and other associated symptoms (nausea, vomiting, light sensitivity, ect.).

Ask for a referral to see a physical therapist. Certain musculoskeletal treatments are very effective in correcting posture and muscle tension, which can be big factors causing headaches. Myofascial and suboccipital release (manual techniques used by physical therapists to correct muscle tension and trigger points), as well as modalities like heat and electrical stimulation (non-painful) to help with pain also are helpful. You should notice an improvement in 6-12 treatments with these techniques.

In light of the growing trend towards self-care, you have more of a responsibility than ever in safely guarding you and your family's health. So instead of reaching for all the nonprescription pain relievers with all the side effects, give physical therapy a try to help manage your headaches and to function more normally.