

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Alan Cranton, DC, ND

Hidden Causes of Headache

In today's pill-popping culture, drugs are often considered the first line of defense against headache pain. The problem? These drugs have a proven history of ineffectiveness. In addition, they are loaded with potentially perilous side effects.

All-natural alternatives, however — such as the type of chiropractic care provided by Dr. Cranton — offer safe and effective ways to end headache pain.



As a provider of holistic health care, Dr. Cranton believes it's important for patients and doctors to work together as a team. With that in mind, Dr. Cranton is focusing this week's *Optimal Health University*® prevention topic on hidden headache instigators — and what patients can do to halt head pain in its tracks.

Vertebral Subluxation

When spinal bones (vertebrae) are misaligned, the result is a common condition known as *vertebral subluxation*. This, in turn, restricts the movement of nerves and muscles: an underlying cause of headache.

Dr. Cranton restores alignment and movement to the spine with safe, gentle maneuvers known as *chiropractic adjustments*.

Neck Tension

Migraine and tension-type headaches are often present in patients reporting neck pain, according to researchers in Australia (*Cephalalgia* 2007;27:793-802).

When neck muscles stiffen and contract — a chain of events frequently sparked by poor posture — the result is a tug-of-war with spinal bones: a scenario that often leads to the development of vertebral subluxation.

That's why medications often fail to alleviate headaches; they focus on symptoms without addressing the root, underlying cause. Chiropractic care, on the other hand, gets to the heart of the matter.

Numerous studies illustrate that chiropractic care successfully relieves neck pain and related tension. For instance, in one study of 119 patients, neck pain was reduced by a whopping 54 percent after four weeks of chiropractic care (approximately 12 visits). And all without drugs (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2000;23:307).

Jaw Problems

Headache is commonly associated with temporomandibular disorder (TMD): the latter being a possible trigger or perpetuating factor (*Dent Clin North Am* 2007;51:129-44).

TMD is an acute or chronic inflammation of the temporomandibular joint (TMJ) that connects the lower jaw to the skull. A study of 1,940 children illustrated the TMD/headache link when it revealed that “the most common symptom of TMD was headache.” (*J Oral Rehabil* 2003;30:1200.)

Eye Strain

Another well-known instigator of

headache is eye strain. Glaring computer monitors and vision difficulties (due to lack of corrective glasses or lenses) are two of the most common causes of eye strain. Flickering fluorescent lights also spark eye strain and headaches.

In the case of uncorrected hyperopia (far-sightedness) and astigmatism (irregularly shaped corneas), the eye's muscles have to work harder to keep an image in focus — leading to tired or aching eyes, poor concentration, headaches and blurring of vision: particularly with close-up work.

Dehydration

Dehydration — another common origin of headache — is also one of the most simple to remedy. To demonstrate this, researchers in the Netherlands enrolled 18 patients in a pilot study. All of the individuals suffered from migraine headache. In addition, two also had tension-type headache.

Patients received either placebo (fake) medication or advice to drink 1.51 times more water than they typically consumed every day for 12 weeks.

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There was no reported change in the placebo group. However, those who boosted their water intake “reduced the total hours of headache in two weeks by 21 hours.” Headache intensity also plummeted (*Eur J Neurol* 2005;12:715-8).

Stress

Emotional anxiety is one of the most common headache instigators. Fortunately, you *can* diffuse this time bomb before it explodes.

To ward off headache, practice at least one stress-busting technique on a daily basis. Winning techniques include:

- ✓ Yoga, T'ai Chi or Pilates
- ✓ Breathing exercises
- ✓ Meditation
- ✓ Prayer
- ✓ Hiking and nature walks
- ✓ Laughter
- ✓ Dancing

Obesity

Obesity is linked to a risk of severe headaches, according to research presented at the 57th Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Neurology. The study indicated that “chronic daily headaches were more prevalent in obese and morbidly obese people than in those with normal body weight.” (*Nutr Today* 2005;40:118.)

Obese people also reported severe pain more often than the other groups. Those with morbid obesity reported that the pain was usually severe 40.2 percent of the time.

If you are overweight, shedding a few pounds may do wonders to alleviate headaches. Healthy weight-reduction strategies, such as daily exercise and a nutritious diet, are also independent headache-prevention factors.

Medication Overuse

The continual use of headache and pain medications — particularly those containing barbiturates and caffeine — amplifies the odds of developing what’s known as medication overuse headache (MOH). According to scientists, “Medication overuse headache is a clinically important entity and it is

now well documented.” (*J Headache Pain* 2005;6:199.)

Painkilling medications also tend to lower blood levels of serotonin: the “feel good” chemical affecting emotion, behavior and cognitive processing. “The principal approach to management of MOH is built around cessation of overused medication,” note researchers. “Without discontinuation of the offending medication, improvement is almost impossible to attain.” (*J Headache Pain* 2005;6:199.)

This is particularly true in the case of over-the-counter (OTC) drugs. It’s estimated that six out of every 10 patients with migraine treat their headaches exclusively with OTC products: ranging from acetaminophen and aspirin to ibuprofen and aspirin-acetaminophen-caffeine combinations. This excessive reliance “contributes to preventable morbidity [ill health] and drug-induced headaches.” (*Pharmacotherapy* 2003;23:494-505.)

When it comes to OTC options, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) may pose the greatest threat. In addition to contributing to MOH, these drugs up the likelihood of stomach ulcers and double the risk of developing heart failure (*Arch Intern Med* 2000;160:777-84).

Hormones

According to a study published earlier this year, migraine headache is *three times* more common in women than men, “occurring in 18.2 percent of women and 6.5 percent of men. The prevalence significantly increases during the peak reproductive years of women (aged 20-50 years), which represents a period of cyclic fluctuations in ovarian hormones as a result of the female menstrual cycle.” (*J Fam Pract* 2007;56:13.)

The researchers noted that pregnancy and menopause can also alter the frequency and disability of preexisting migraine attacks “or may lead to the new onset of migraine in some women.”

Instead of resorting to drugs — many of which have potentially serious side effects — talk with your doctor about

adding a magnesium supplement to your diet. In a study of 20 patients with menstrual migraine, sufferers received magnesium (360 mg daily) or placebo beginning on the 15th day of their menstrual cycle and continuing until the next menses for two months. “The patients who received magnesium had a significant reduction in pain scores, number of days with headache, and perimenstrual complaints.” (*J Fam Pract* 2007;56:13.)

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Although rare, one of the most preventable — and deadly — causes of headache is carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning.

According to the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries, “Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless gas produced by all internal combustion engines including diesel and propane-powered engines. It is also produced by burning wood, paper or plastic products and from welding when carbon dioxide shielding gas is used.”

Fortunately, specially designed detectors can monitor your home’s air for the presence of this deadly gas. If you don’t already own a CO detector, make sure to pick one up today.

Other common fumes and odorless gasses may also spark headache.

Rely on All-Natural Relief

Regularly scheduled chiropractic care is the key to preventing pain and illness. The focus of the chiropractic approach is warding off health complaints before they occur. However, if headache does strike, don’t reach for drugs. Instead, consider the all-natural relief options promoted by our chiropractic office.

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