WHAT'S WRONG?

Cervicogenic Headache

Headaches affect almost half of the population. Fifteen to twenty percent of all headaches arise from problems in the neck and are classified as "cervicogenic headaches." The most common trigger for cervicogenic headache is limited movement of the joints in your upper cervical spine. Normally, each of the joints in your neck moves freely and independently. Sometimes, restrictions in the upper cervical spine initiate a painful cycle of stiffness, muscle tightness, and joint inflammation. This may cause irritation to the sensitive nerves leading from your neck into the back of your head.

Cervicogenic headaches are most commonly one-sided, but occasionally may be present on both sides of the head. Pain often radiates from the base of your skull toward the top of your head and sometimes over your eyes. In rare instances, the pain may travel into your arm. These headache episodes may last from hours to days. The pain is continuous but fluctuating and is often described as "deep." You may also notice chronic neck tenderness and stiffness.

Cervicogenic headache symptoms may be triggered or reproduced by awkward movements and postures. The condition is more common in patients who have recently experienced trauma, especially a motor vehicle accident or an earlier concussion. The condition often affects middle-aged adults and is more common in women at a rate of four to one. Cervicogenic headaches are sometimes accompanied by poor posture, including a "slouched" or "forward head" posture.

Be sure to tell us if you notice your headaches are becoming progressively worse over time if you experience a sudden onset of a severe headache, a new or unfamiliar headache, or if you notice significant neck stiffness, rash, numbness, or tingling on your face, light-headedness, dizziness, loss of consciousness, difficulty speaking, difficulty swallowing, difficulty walking, nausea, numbness radiating into your arms or legs, or fever.

Being dehydrated can aggravate or cervicogenic headaches. Make sure that you are drinking 6-8 glasses of water each day, more in hot weather or when you've been sweating. Since cervicogenic headaches result from a mechanical problem, medicines are often ineffective. Fortunately, our office has several tools to help solve this problem.

THINGS WE CAN DO TO HELP YOU

Here is a brief description of the treatments we may use to help manage your problem.
Joint Manipulation

Your provider has found joints in your body that are not moving freely. This can cause tightness and discomfort and can accelerate unwanted degeneration i.e. arthritis. Your provider will apply a gentle force with their hands, or with handheld instruments, in order to restore motion to any "restricted" joints. Sometimes a specialized table will be used to assist with these safe and effective "adjustments". Joint manipulation improves flexibility, relieves pain, and helps maintain healthy joints.

Myofascial Release

Overworked muscles often become tight and develop knots or "trigger points". Chronic tightness produces inflammation and swelling that ultimately leads to the formation of "adhesions" between tissues. Your provider will apply pressure with their hands, or with specialized tools, in order to release muscle tightness and soft-tissue adhesions. This will help to improve your circulation, relieve pain and restore flexibility.

Therapeutic Exercise

Muscle tightness or weakness causes discomfort and alters normal joint function, leading to additional problems. Your chiropractor will target tight or weak muscles with specific therapeutic stretching and strengthening to help increase tissue flexibility, build strength, and ease the pain. Healthy, strong, and flexible muscles may help prevent re-injury.

TREATMENT GOALS AND OUTCOME MEASURES

Your treatment will be most effective when scheduled at a rate of 3 times per week for 2 weeks. After this initial course of treatment we will reassess to make sure that you have met your initial treatment goal of at least 50% overall improvement. We will determine the need for any additional care after your reassessment.

THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOURSELF

Your everyday activities, habits, and postures can have a dramatic impact on your body. The following advice will help you minimize stress while improving your comfort and health:
Workstation Ergonomics

Ergonomics is the science of adjusting your workstation to minimize strain in the following ways: -

- Monitors should be visible without leaning or straining and the top line of type should be 15 degrees below eye level.
- Use audio equipment that keeps you from bending your neck (i.e., Bluetooth, speakerphones, headsets).
- Keep your shoulders relaxed and elbows bent to 90 degrees.
- Wrist should not be bent while at the keyboard. Forearms and wrists should not be leaning on a hard edge.
- Keep frequently used objects, like your telephone, close to your body to prevent excessive reaching.
- Take a 10-second break every 20 minutes: Micro activities include: walking, stretching, or moving your head in a "plus sign" fashion.
- Periodically, perform the "Brugger relief position" - Position your body at a chair's edge, feet pointed outward. Weight should be on your legs and your abdomen should be relaxed. Tilt your pelvis forward, lift your sternum, arch your back, drop your arms, and roll out your palms while squeezing your shoulders together. Take a few deep cleansing breaths.

Sitting Workstations- Hips and knees bent 90 degrees, feet flat on floor or footrest.
- Use a lumbar roll for lower back support.
- Avoid sitting on anything that would create an imbalance or uneven pressure (like your wallet).

Standing Workstations- Keep your head, neck, torso, and legs vertically aligned.
- Wear shoes that provide proper arch support.
- Use a footrest to shift your weight from foot to foot.
- Adjust the footrest to approximately 10% of your total body height.

Pillow Selection

To avoid neck and upper back pain from improper neck support: - Select a pillow that will hold your head in a neutral position while sleeping on your side or back.
- Avoid excessively thick or multiple pillows.
- Choose a fiberfill or feather/down pillow as these are usually better than foam.
- Consider a commercially available pillow that promotes good neck posture.

EXERCISES AT HOME

The following exercises have been specifically selected to assist with your recovery and help minimize future problems. Exercises should be performed slowly and within a relatively comfortable range. Maintain good posture and breathe naturally. Do not hold your breath. Unless otherwise instructed, stop any exercises that cause pain, or radiating symptoms.
Current Exercises

Deep Neck Flexion
Perform 1 set of 10 reps, 3 times per day.
Lie on your back, with your head supported. Perform a "chin tuck" by retracting your head to create a double chin. Lift your head, bringing chin toward your chest without lifting shoulders- as though you are looking at your toes. Hold this position for 3-4 seconds. Lower your head and relax. Keep your teeth apart during exercise to decrease straining at the jaw. Perform as directed.

Brugger with Band
Perform 3 sets of 10 reps, 2 times.
Begin sitting or standing with an elastic exercise band wrapped and secured around your palms. Begin with your arms at your side, elbows bent, forearm's pointing forward. Move your hands apart from each other to maximally stretch the band while simultaneously rotating your palms out, straightening your arms, and pinching your shoulder blades together as your hands move behind your hips. Return to the start position and repeat 3 sets of 10 repetitions daily, or as directed.
C1-C2 Rotation SNAG

Perform 1 set of 10 reps, 1 time per day.

Begin seated or standing. Grasp a (lengthy) rolled towel with both hands. With the hand on your unaffected side, hold the towel at the level of your chest. With the other hand, wrap the towel around the back of your neck. Actively rotate your head until you feel pain or lack of motion. With gentle pressure, use the towel to pull your head into slightly more rotation. Hold this position for one second then return to the starting position. Stop if you feel sharp pain or any other unusual symptom. Perform as directed.

Headache SNAG

Perform 1 set of 10 reps, 1 time per day.

Begin seated or standing. Grasp a rolled towel with both hands. Place the towel behind your neck, just below your skull. Gently pull the towel forward while slowly bringing your chin into your throat as to create a double chin. At the same time, imagine "growing taller" to elongate your neck. Hold this position for one second then return to the starting position. Stop if you feel sharp pain or any other unusual symptom. Perform as directed.