



## So What's a Headache Anyway?

Headaches, most of us have experienced them from time to time, however the headache is a phenomenon that is misunderstood by most people.

A headache is not a normal event. There are no "normal headaches", or regular headaches. Simply put, a headache is a sign or symptom that "something" is not working as it should.

Several years ago anatomists discovered that muscles in the upper neck connect to the covering of the brain called the dura-mata. Muscles in the upper neck often get tight or go into spasm when the spine misaligns. When this happens the dura-mata distorts and puts pressure on the brain and the blood vessels going to the brain.

These mechanical imbalances not only cause headaches, but also anxiety, dizziness, vertigo, and sinus drainage issues. Many people complain of being unable to focus or feel scattered when this type of pressure was present on the tissues in the upper neck.

More recently Duke School of Medicine conducted a study that showed that misalignments of the cervical vertebrae alter blood flow into the head by compressing the arteries supplying the brain.

When the neck is the cause of the headache it is deemed a cervicogenic headache. This is not a rare event. In fact the worlds leading neuroscientist, Nikoli Bogduk M.D, PH.D, estimated that 80% of headaches are actually caused by the neck.

Medicine has not been quick to respond to this compelling evidence. This mechanical link has been ignored due to medicines inability to treat it. Instead medicine chooses to address aberrant blood flow with medications, rather than addressing the mechanical problems that started the symptoms to begin with.

Migraine headache patients are often put on powerful medications to control blood flow to the brain, and these chemical messengers flood the vessels of the body attempt to restore "normal" blood flow. In treating migraine patients it is not unusual to find that the taking blood pressure medications, beta-blockers, calcium channel blockers and a variety of specialized drugs for headaches like Imitrex. These patients almost never get better, and have to rely on the medications due to rebound headaches.

Rebound headache is a term used to describe a headache that returns once the drug to treat it is cleared out of the system.. These rebound headaches are treated by giving the medication that

caused the rebound. It's a vicious cycle and the problem is never adequately addressed.

This method is obviously seriously flawed and I relate the theory of headache management in medicine to a roommate of mine in college who decided he could avoid hangovers by staying drunk indefinitely.

This sounds amusing but this mentality is the same as one that dictates administering medications that suppresses symptoms but then initiate a rebound, requiring it to be taken to again and again to stop the ensuing rebound headache. Unfortunately this treatment I have described is the standard of care in headache management.

This comes from not addressing the primary problem, and dealing only with the symptoms. The problem, as the researchers have shown, is the cervical vertebra misalignment interfering with blood flow to the brain. This mechanical problem can never be fixed with medication.

I make it a point during my history with my patients to find out if they have had trauma to the cervical spine and then carefully evaluate the neck with specific tests to target problems. A thorough X-ray analysis helps to uncover spinal misalignments and then specific treatments called adjustments are delivered restore the vertebra to the proper position. This alleviates the abnormal blood flow and often corrects the headache at the source.

Treating the cause of the headache, and not merely covering symptoms with medications, gives the patient a chance for complete recovery without the unwanted side affects of medication.

Many patients have experienced resolution of their headaches without re-occurrence after having the underlying cause corrected. That is something for you to think about when you or someone you know has a headache.

Yours in health,

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