Chiropractic care effective for headaches

By Dr. Brent Wells
Better Health Pain and Wellness Centers

Your head is throbbing. Your neck is stiff and sore. The slightest noise or ray of light makes you cringe. Nausea is about to overtake you. Your vision may be blurred.

You have a headache.

Unfortunately, these symptoms are not uncommon. Headaches are the fifth most common reason for outpatient medical care, and it's estimated that one in three people will experience severe headaches at some point in their life.

So what causes these debilitating headaches and – more importantly – what can you do about them?

Common causes of headaches

Headaches can be caused by a number of factors, including:

- Spinal problems in the neck
- Muscular tension in the muscles at the back of the head and neck
- Red meat, dairy products, alcohol and foods high in caffeine, salt, sugar and protein
- Environmental stimuli, like noises, lights and stress
- Behaviors, like insomnia, excessive exercise and blood sugar changes

Headaches and migraines are often a common symptom after a head injury, concussion or whiplash injury. They can also be a symptom of a more serious physical condition, which is why it is important to be evaluated by a health care professional if you have frequent, severe headaches, or headaches lasting more than two days.

A little bit about your body

To understand headaches and how neck problems can cause them, it is helpful to know a little bit about how your body – and especially your spine – works.

Your spine protects one of the most important and amazing body systems – your nervous system. Your nervous system delivers messages from your brain to the rest of your body, giving you the ability to breathe, move, feel, see, smell, and speak.

This incredible system is made up of several parts, including your:

- Brain, which sends messages that control your body
- Spinal cord, which links your brain to the rest of your body
- Spinal nerves, which extend out from the spinal cord and deliver your brain's messages to the rest of the body
- Spine, which is made up of moveable bones called vertebrae that protect the spinal cord and allow you to move freely
- Discs, which act as spacers and shock absorbers between each vertebrae

Headaches and neck pain

Neck pain is one of the leading causes of chronic headaches. Neck pain is also the eighth most common reason people visit their doctor – and it's estimated that about 70 percent of us will suffer from neck pain at some point in our lives.

Additionally, neck pain is one of the leading causes of disability today, with approximately $50 – $80 billion dollars spent every year in treatment and lost wages.

Some common neck problems that can cause headaches and neck pain include:

Sprained ligaments – When severe enough, sprained ligaments can allow the vertebrae to move more than they should, causing a condition called instability. Instability, if not treated, will cause the spine to develop arthritis at up to six times the rate of normal aging.

Herniated or bulging discs – These are caused when the material in the middle of a disc ruptures or pushes to one side, causing pain, pressure, pinched nerves and swelling.

Disc degeneration – Healthy discs are flexible, like a moist sponge. However, injuries, such as whiplash, can cause small tears in the disc, causing the disc to lose fluid and wear thin.

Subluxations – Most ligament and disc problems in the spine will be accompanied by a condition called a subluxation. This is when one or more vertebrae becomes "misaligned" or "stuck" due to bulging or degenerated discs, stiff muscles, or even scar tissue. The longer the spine stays out of its normal position, the faster the discs will wear out. When subluxations are left untreated, the adjacent vertebrae can begin to fuse together.

Whiplash – Whiplash, also called neck sprain or neck strain, is an injury to the neck caused by the sudden movement of the head backward, forward or sideways. This movement can result in stretched or torn neck muscles or ligaments, bulging or herniated discs, subluxations and loss of the neck's normal forward curve.

Whiplash is most commonly caused by auto accidents. Every year, about 3 million Americans suffer whiplash injuries from auto accidents – and these accidents don't have to be major. Vehicles can usually withstand collisions of 10 mph without damage. However, whiplash can be caused in accidents of just 5 mph. Sports, falls and other injuries can also be responsible for whiplash.

Treatment for headaches and neck pain

Worldwide, more than 13,000 tons (26 million pounds), of aspirin are consumed each year to treat headaches and neck pain. However, there is a better way.

Today, chiropractic care is one of the most common alternative treatments for headaches. And, according to many studies, chiropractic care is one of the most effective treatments for headaches.

For example:

- Chiropractic care results in almost immediate improvement of headaches originating in the neck.
- Chiropractic patients retain benefits even after stopping care, while headache patients who receive drugs lose about half of their improvements.
- Headache patients who received chiropractic care experience significantly fewer side effects, compared to patients who receive medication.

In addition to chiropractic care, other treatments are also showing successful results. These include the ground-breaking Multi-Cervical Unit (MCU) therapy, introduced to Alaska in 2002 by Better Health Pain and Wellness Centers.

"Since 1995, I suffered from severe neck pain and headaches, with a great deal of stiffness," said Tina Johnson, a Better Health Pain and Wellness Centers patient.

"After MCU therapy, my neck strength has improved a great deal and the consistent pain is gone! I feel like I have a new lease on life."

The MCU, available exclusively in Alaska at Better Health Pain and Wellness Centers, succeeds in treating neck pain where other therapies have failed because it emphasizes the restoration of neck movement and strength. MCU therapy is also currently the only system that provides comprehensive diagnosis and treatment all in one system.

Benefits of chiropractic care

There are many benefits to chiropractic care, including:

- Pain relief
- Reduced muscle spasms
- Slowed development of arthritis
- Increased mobility
- Improved posture
- Reduced chance of injury or re-injury

And chiropractic care is not just for headaches and neck pain – it is also an effective treatment for:

- Arthritis
- Back pain
- Bursitis
- Degenerated discs
- Disc bulges or herniation
- Fibromyalgia
- Hip/leg pain
- Joint pain
- Muscle imbalance/ weakness
- Post-surgical cases
- Posture problems
- Sciatica
- Scoliosis
- Whiplash injuries

Better Health Pain and Wellness Centers

Dr. Brent Wells, chiropractic physician and clinic director, opened Better Health Pain and Wellness Centers in 1998, after seeing the need for a multidisciplinary clinic where patients could receive a full range of effective, conservative treatments from an experienced, friendly staff in a comfortable, compassionate environment.

Since opening their doors, Dr. Wells and his talented, knowledgeable staff have treated thousands of Alaskans. They've also introduced many advanced technologies to Alaska, including the DRS system for low back pain and MCU therapy for neck pain.

Better Health Pain and Wellness Centers takes a multidisciplinary approach to treating neck pain and other conditions. Chiropractic care is used for correcting spinal position and improving joint and disc health. Physical therapy and massage reduces muscular pain and problems. The DRS system relieves pain and treats low back conditions, while MCU therapy addresses neck pain.

If you are suffering from headaches, neck pain or other conditions contact Better Health Pain and Wellness Centers. In Anchorage call 907-346-5255 or outside Anchorage call 1-877-346-5255. Or learn more at www.bhpw.com.

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