

INNER CIRCLE INSIGHTS

Headaches Are Not in Your Head



Are you suffering from headaches? Are you feeling frustrated or hopeless? Many people experience headaches and, even worse, migraines. Some suffer intermittent headaches and the unfortunate suffer from headaches every day. They have been bounced around from doctor to chiropractor, and from nutritionist to pain specialist. They feel that people are guessing at the reason for their headaches and can be left with no clear answers.

Understanding the cause of a headache is difficult as there are many possible contributing factors including, but not limited to: head and neck trauma (including concussion), stress, tumors, aneurysm, chiari malformation, sinus issues, dehydration, food allergies (including nitrates), lack of sleep, eye strain, and caffeine and alcohol consumption.

After ruling out major medical issues like tumors and vascular causes, medical professionals attempt to ease headaches with various interventions. They have patients record their headaches and possible causes using headache diaries. In these diaries, the patients record what they do, how they sleep, what they eat, etc., to find a link between their daily life and the headaches.

Doctors also prescribe medications, beginning with NSAIDS and prescription pain medications and progressing to specific migraine medications. Some of the common migraine medications include DHE-45, Imitrex, Maxalt, Amerge, Axert and Frova. They may also prescribe Botox injections, attempting to decrease the tension throughout the head, neck, and shoulders. Eye doctors will look for a link between visual issues and headaches, attempting to decrease eye strain or correct visual deficits. Other doctors will look at specific foods, caffeine and alcohol trying to systematically limit the intake of specific substances to find the cause of headaches. In many instances, these treatments fail. Medications only help temporarily by turning off the pain signal, not addressing the cause. Often, visual issues are not the root of the problem but may instead be another symptom. In many cases, limiting food, caffeine, and alcohol does not change the frequency or intensity of headaches.

Ultimately, patients make their way to physical therapy offices looking for help. We at Inner Circle Physical Therapy & Myofascial Release Center have been highly successful at eliminating intermittent and constant headaches. Our full body, hands-on approach starts with a comprehensive evaluation. We assess a patient's posture, the range of motion of your neck and shoulders as well as your mid back/thoracic spine and low back/lumbar spine to give us clues. We have found that headaches can arise from issues throughout the body as far away as your legs and pelvis. Unfortunately, many healthcare providers have a narrow scope of headache causes. They are trained to focus on the area of the body near the symptoms, often missing some of the full body connections. At Inner Circle, the therapists view the patient in a softer focus, recognizing the far-reaching contributing factors of posture and soft tissue restrictions.

Common postural issues that we find connected to headaches are:

- pelvic asymmetries/imbalance
- increased lumbar lordosis (swayback)
- increased thoracic kyphosis (rounded midback)
- scoliosis
- rounded shoulders
- straightening of the cervical lordosis
- forward head/tilted head

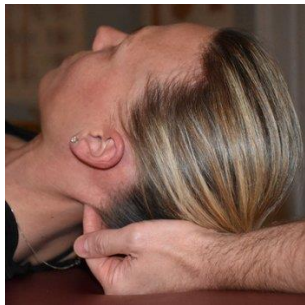
Assessing range of motion throughout the body is important as deficits tend to correlate with restrictions in the soft tissue. Through a hands-on assessment of the musculature and soft tissues, we usually uncover tension, spasm, or restriction in the soft tissue of major postural areas. For example, there is a high correlation between headaches and restriction in the following muscles: quadriceps (thigh); psoas and quadratus lumborum (core); lumbar and thoracic paraspinals (low and mid back); sternocleidomastoids and scalenes (front and side of neck);

trapezius and scapula (neck and upper back); pectoralis and biceps (chest and arms); masseters and pterygoids (jaw).

Fascia, or the connective tissue of the body, is another very important structure involved in headaches. This strong and supportive soft tissue surrounds and interconnects bones, muscles, and organs. If it is bound down or shortened, it can create compressive or restrictive forces throughout the body. This can lead to pressure on pain sensitive structures like muscles, nerves and blood vessels. Fascia is often overlooked, but it is extremely important in successfully addressing the causes of headaches.

We have also found that there is an emotional or psychological component connected to the muscular and postural aspect of headaches. Our bodies and minds are significantly connected. When we are stressed, angry, or upset - we tense, tighten, and harden. Past emotional and psychological trauma compounded by daily stress and tension can create a body filled with spasm and restriction. If we do not address these adverse effects of stress and trauma, physical symptoms of pain and tension will appear and build over time.

Many of the muscles of the mid back, neck, and head will start to undergo a pain-spasm cycle in which the more tension you create, the more pain you feel until you are experiencing pain all day, every day. Headaches are a direct result of this phenomenon. A signal that your headaches are a result of this condition is the inclusion of many other symptoms that people don't normally connect. These common symptoms tend to exist together: sinus issues, tinnitus, neck pain, jaw pain, swallowing issues, visual disturbances, vertigo, fatigue or mental fog.



Gathering all this important information during an initial evaluation directs the therapist to the possible physical/mental/emotional causes of a patient's headache. The therapist then creates a plan of care to address the issues revealed in the evaluation. Inner Circle therapists are highly trained in a multitude of hands-on techniques. Each therapist has spent many years learning and practicing John F. Barnes' Myofascial Release (MFR). Our therapists are recognized as either advanced or expert MFR clinicians skilled in powerful techniques to address the soft tissues throughout the body. These hands-on skills are the foundation of our practice and are responsible for our success in resolving the underlying causes of headaches. We also employ therapeutic exercises and self-treatment to achieve postural correction. Our therapists instruct patients in the importance of breathing and relaxation as well as increasing the patient's

awareness of their body. This approach results in a patient understanding the cause of their headaches. Patients become aware of their bodies and can identify areas of tension and restriction, and how their emotional and psychological health affect those areas. They are also equipped with exercises, and self-treatment techniques specifically aimed at their problems, and possess the confidence and knowledge to be their own therapist.

Professionally Yours,

James Mulholland, MSPT

For an Appointment or Further Inquiry:

(215) 860-3623

www.InnerCirclePT.com

"The Natural Force Within Each of Us is the Greatest Healer of Disease"

-Hippocrates