

# Stay Active and Healthy

# Newsletter

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## Treatment for Headache Pain

### Upcoming Events

**December 2009: Here we GROW again!** We are moving our clinic across the road (corner of Mosley and 33rd St.) in December to serve you better! Come visit us at our new location in December and in the New Year!

December 29th: Wasaga Beach Olympic Torch Run.

In both Canada and the United States headaches are a significant problem in society. From a point of human suffering and health care costs headaches are a major drain on health care budgets. Professional visits, tests and x-rays, prescriptions as well as lost productivity due to missed days at work or work done while in pain and functioning at less than optimal levels all add up to an enormous cost.

From studies conducted in 1992 we learned that 14% of Canadians suffer migraine headaches and 50% of these (7%) describe the pain as giving them significant disability. 36% of Canadians suffer from chronic tension headaches and 14% have both migraine and tension types. Over 7 million workdays per year were lost because of headaches. In the U.S. 27% of females and 14% of males suffer from serious headaches.

Given these staggering numbers of people who cope with head pain one would think that our knowledge and understanding of headaches as well as our collective clinical treatment experience would be vast. Indeed, much is unknown concerning the cause and treatment of this common disorder. In a 1994 Consumer's Report survey the highest level of treatment dissatisfaction was from headache sufferers. 25% of headache patients are unhappy with the treatment they receive and 27% of all headache sufferers seek treatment other than medicine. The most frequent non-medical health professional consulted for headaches is a chiropractor.

Sometimes the decision as to whom one should consult for a headache is difficult for a patient; perhaps this series of brief articles will help in that decision. To reach a decision, several questions need to be asked.

"Are my headaches primary or secondary?" Primary headaches are also known

as benign or simple headaches. These account for over 90% of all headaches. They are called primary as these are headaches that are not caused by some underlying disease process. Primary headaches are not life-threatening to the patient beyond the pain itself. The category of primary or benign includes tension, migraine and cluster headaches.

Secondary headaches are caused by disease processes, some of which pose dire threats to the patients and are of grave concern to the treating health professional. Although there are many possible diseases that can result in secondary headaches, the most serious ones are tumours, hemorrhages and meningitis.

"How can the doctor tell the difference between primary and secondary?" Most useful information about a headache diagnosis is attained by a detailed history and physical examination. Advanced imaging techniques such as CT scans and MRIs are touted to be highly useful in the art of diagnosis, but in reality studies have shown that given the cost, the exposure to radiation, and the relative high value of a good history and physical exam, CT and MRI are of very limited value. It has been estimated that statistically it would take over 11,000 headache patients all having these procedures to find one positive scan. Despite this fact, in the Portland, Oregon area of the U.S. a study showed that 24% of tension headache patients and 32% of migraine sufferers had had either a CT scan or a MRI. I'm sure that this is representative of most other areas as well.

"What treatment is best for my headaches?" Having ascertained that your headaches are primary in nature, you now have a number of treatment options. However, most headache sufferers go either to their family physi-

cian or their chiropractor or frequently both. What is the difference?

Medical treatment of benign headaches is aimed at either ending a current episode or preventing future ones. Prevention medications are taken daily, whether one has a headache or not and are usually in the form of tricyclic antidepressants such as amitriptyline or beta-blockers. The attempts to end a current headache are usually analgesics such as aspirin, ibuprofen (e.g. Advil or Motrin), or acetaminophen (Tylenol), barbiturates or vascular constrictors (caffergot). Some patients respond to the non-steroid Imitrex. If none of these will abort a headache, injections of narcotics such as Demerol are often administered in emergency situations. The biggest disadvantage of drug therapies, of course, is the myriad of side effects, contra-indications, rebound effects and the sinister and common threat of addiction to prescription drugs.

Chiropractic treatments in the form of adjustments and manipulation to the upper thoracic, cervical spine and occiput have been shown effective for aborting current headache pain. Combine this with soft tissue therapies offered by some chiropractors and you have a winning combination. However, the real value in chiropractic treatment is in the prevention of future episodes. Chiropractic care is only of value when problems in the neck and spine are factors in the headache diagnosis. Clinical experience has shown that these problems tend to be found in the majority of headache sufferers.

# Natural Back Pain Remedies

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Orthotics and Much More!..

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Back pain is an extremely common condition. According to the National Institutes of Health, nearly everyone will experience back pain at some point. In many cases, this condition can be alleviated by using natural back pain remedies. Most of these remedies are considered safe and people can use them without having to worry about possible side effects.

Back pain can be mild or severe. In several cases, the pain is usually caused by a medical condition such as arthritis, or an injury. Common causes of back pain include sports injuries, automobile accidents, or lifting heavy objects. A person who has back pain may experience stiffness, sore muscles, and difficulty standing up straight.

### Acupuncture Pain Relief

Chinese medicine has long supported the notion of acupuncture pain relief and healing qualities. The belief is that acupuncture stimulates the body to produce natural pain relievers that help the body heal itself. It is recommended that patients get treatments once a week for several weeks. Research indicates that people who use acupuncture for natural back pain relief, are often still free from pain nearly two

years after the treatment ends.

Researchers analyzed the effectiveness of acupuncture in treating back muscle pain, in a study at Sheffield University in the United Kingdom. 159 people participated in the study. Nearly half of the participants underwent acupuncture treatments. This group saw their symptoms gradually subside. Within two years, their pain was completely gone.

### Vitamin D for Natural Back Pain Relief

Researchers are finding a growing amount of evidence that some back pain is caused by a deficiency of vitamin D. According to a study published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (May 2008), older women with inadequate vitamin D levels were twice as likely to experience moderate to severe back pain. Researchers believe this is because a lack of vitamin D can cause the bones to soften, which causes lower back pain.

The National Osteoporosis Foundation recommends that adults get 400-800 IU of vitamin D daily. People who have darker skin, such as Hispanics, Asians and African Americans, are more

at risk for vitamin D deficiency because dark skin does not sufficiently transform the sun's UV rays into vitamin D. Foods that contain vitamin D fortified juices, milk, and cereals, and certain fish.

### Willow Bark Extract

Willow bark extract is also considered to be among the back pain remedies that are proven to work. Willow bark works as a natural pain reliever. It has the same effect on the body as aspirin. White willow bark contains salicin. Once a person consumes salicin, the body turns it into salicylic acid, which reduces inflammation and pain. A study published in the *American Journal of Medicine* supports the effectiveness of willow bark extract as a treatment for lower back muscle pain. Researchers found that nearly half of the participants who received willow bark extract improved significantly after one week, and were pain free after four weeks or treatment. As with any supplement it is important to consult a doctor before starting a new supplement to make sure it is right for you,

## Laughter is the best Medicine..



"You can't go out dressed like that!  
People will think you're easy..."

