



Headaches – Relief is possible

Where do they come from?

Headaches can come from several sources and for several reasons. A few types of headaches have very specific patterns which may help us to diagnose them.

Migraine and **cluster** headache attacks are often of severe pulsating quality, may switch from one side of the head to the other, and may be accompanied by nausea and other symptoms. They are caused by contraction of the arteries to the brain. They respond to specific medication.

Tension-type headaches may last longer and are associated with sustained contraction of the neck muscles, usually as part of the individual's response during life-stress.

Cervicogenic headaches are caused by structures (joints, muscles) supplied by the first three cervical (neck) nerve roots. Irritation of these may cause pain in the head or face. They may present in any pattern, with different degrees of severity and may also be associated with nausea. Precipitating factors often are sustained positions, movements and stress situations.

What can physiotherapy do?

Your physiotherapist can treat the joints and muscles in and around your neck to relieve the headache. She/he will then advise you on your posture in general, and in front of your desk or computer. She/he may give you exercises to strengthen certain muscles and stretch/relax others.

What can you do for yourself?

- Visit your general practitioner to exclude any disease causing your headache.
- Watch your posture – especially if you have round shoulders with a forward poking chin – and try to correct it. You may have to visit your physiotherapist to help you with this for the first time.

- Have a look at your sitting position in front of your desk or computer. Is it right in front of you? Is the computer screen almost level with your eyes? Can your forearms rest on the surface in front of the keyboard or mouse? Does your chair support your back?
- Take a break every hour and do some shoulder rolls and stretches to relax your shoulders and neck for two minutes.
- Find a sport or activity to relax your neck and shoulders. Swimming, aqua-aerobics, brisk walking for 20 minutes may take away the stresses that have built up during the day.
- Learn how to relax your muscles when daily stresses overwhelm you.
- If you clench your jaws during the night – ask your dentist to supply you with a small front teeth bite-plate, and do jaw-relaxation exercises in the morning
- Visit a manual physiotherapist that is interested in the management of headache disorders for a thorough examination and treatment.
- For further information contact www.omptg.co.za or omtgsa@icon.co.za.

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