

health link

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Headaches: A Multidisciplinary Approach



Dr. Gaurav Bhardwaj
Medical Doctor

DIAGNOSIS:

A headache is defined as diffuse pain in various parts of the head, with the pain not confined to the area of distribu-

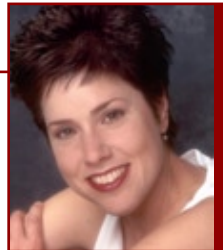
tion of a nerve. Headaches are classified into primary and secondary categories. Worrisome features of secondary headaches include sudden onset, onset after 50 years of age, increased frequency or severity, associated with systemic illness, focal neurologic signs or symptoms and subsequent to head trauma. However, most headaches fall into the primary category and include migraine, tension-type and cluster headaches. Primary headaches are usually recurrent and have no associated organic disease.

TREATMENT:

Treatment options for primary headaches vary depending on the intensity, duration and frequency of the symptoms. Often the treatment plan must be individualized to each patient using either pharmacological and or non-pharmacological methods. If the cause of a headache can be isolated, such as sleep deprivation or medication side effects, then the treatment is to deal with the causative factor. However, if no obvious etiology is found, first line therapy usually involves over-the-counter analgesics such as acetaminophen and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory such as ibuprofen.

OTHER TREATMENTS:

When considering migraines and other primary headaches that are more debilitating in terms of intensity and duration it is often necessary to use prescription medications to either treat, prevent or abort headaches. However, even when dealing with migraines, a holistic approach involving lifestyle modification and medication works better than each individually.



Jean LaMantia
Registered Dietitian

DIAGNOSIS:

There are many causes of headaches, several of which may be affected by nutrition. For

example headaches may be caused by low blood sugar, high blood pressure, caffeine withdrawal, dehydration or a food or ingredient sensitivity. Tracking your food intake, your symptoms and keeping food labels would be helpful for us to determine if there is a nutrition link to your headaches.

TREATMENT:

As a registered dietitian I would thoroughly examine your food records to assess if a diet-related factor may be causing or contributing to headaches. I would then devise a nutrition plan to help prevent future headaches. Treating low blood sugar, high blood pressure, dehydration, caffeine withdrawal and food sensitivities are a common part of my practice, and proper treatment would provide relief from your headaches.

OTHER TREATMENT METHODS:

If I suspect that you have low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) then I will refer you to your doctor to order a test called a glucose tolerance test. I would test your blood pressure in my office, but I would also have your doctor assess this as well. Since headaches can have more than one trigger a referral to Dr. Jummy Kim for complementary therapy such as acupuncture and acupressure could also be part of my treatment plan.



Dr. Selene Wilkinson
Naturopathic Doctor

DIAGNOSIS:

There are many different factors such as food sensitivities, dehydration, stress, high blood pressure, poor posture,

physiological issues, sinus infections, head injuries and side effects of certain medications that can cause headaches. To diagnose the type and cause of your headache I would analyze your medical history, diet, stress, exercise habits, lifestyle, bowel habits, physiological and psychological status and sleeping patterns.

TREATMENT:

Food sensitivities and stress would be addressed and a diet plan, stress management techniques and supplements may be recommended. If indicated I would use acupuncture and/or acupressure, to release tense muscles due to stress or injury. Acupuncture can also clear stagnation that may be impeding your flow of energy or 'Qi,' and causing you to suffer from headaches. Homeopathy remedies such as Belladonna may be prescribed, as well as herbs such as feverfew. Hydrotherapy can be used to treat headaches using cold and hot water on both the head and the feet. Massage can also help release chronic neck and shoulder tension and maintain an even blood flow to the head.

OTHER TREATMENT METHODS:

If headaches persist, looking at various in office testing and other diagnostic methods may be used to be sure the root cause of the headaches is not of a more serious nature. Chiropractic manipulations may also be indicated and can be very beneficial for headaches.





Dr. Jumy Kim
Acupuncturist / TCM
Doctor

DIAGNOSIS:

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), there are various causes for headaches. Some

examples of causes are blood stasis, yin and yang imbalance, energy (Qi) stagnation and the list goes on. The different headache causes and readings can tell me where the needles must go for relief. Surprisingly, the condition of the tongue and pulse can tell a lot about the type of headache and the effect it has on the body system as a whole.

TREATMENT:

I would insert small needles into certain pressure points of the body. The combination of the needles allow the Qi, the body's energy, to flow more freely, therefore eliminating the problems that cause discomfort and headache pain. Sometimes, I may prescribe herbal medicine or acupressure massage (tuina) to assist you further along in the treatment.

OTHER TREATMENT METHODS:

If your headache is related to a neck or back strain, I would refer you to our Chiropractor, Physiotherapist or Massage Therapist to assist you in releasing the tension from your neck, shoulders and back. If your headache was related to your diet, I would refer you to our Dietitian. Finally, if I thought your condition was more serious, I would refer you to our family physician who can order further tests to make sure that your headache is not a symptom of a more serious condition.



Pam Honeyman
Physiotherapist

DIAGNOSIS:

Physiotherapists treat headaches that are due to irritation of the joints or soft

tissues of the neck. These neck structures may refer pain to the head creating a headache. When I assess a headache patient, a detailed history is taken to see if the cause of the headache is influenced by the neck. I would then examine: the client's posture; their neck range of motion; the neck muscles and joints of the neck to see if a stiff or too mobile joint triggers the pain.

TREATMENT:

The way I would treat a neck headache is to give manual (hands on) therapy of the neck for pain relief and to reduce joint stiffness in the neck and/or the upper back area. I would also train neck muscles to help with good postural control, use ultrasound, give acupuncture, provide myofascial release (massage-like) techniques, prescribe stretches and general strengthening as needed, teach self massage and relief positioning advice, likely suggest heat (case dependent). Extensive education would be also given so the patient understands the cause of the headache and how to prevent further episodes in the future.

OTHER TREATMENT METHODS:

I may refer to a GP for further investigation or medications if the patient present is not responding to treatment. I often refer to massage or acupuncture to complement the physio treatment.



Regan Walker
Registered Massage
Therapist

DIAGNOSIS:

People experience a wide variety of different types of headaches for a variety of reasons.

These reasons range from chronic muscle strain due to poor posture, hormonal imbalances, toxicity from various things such as medications, allergies, improper nutrition, and stress. Headaches can often be diagnosed through various symptoms being expressed, such as frequency, duration, location, and aggravating factors.

TREATMENT:

As a registered massage therapist I would perform a thorough case history to determine my method of treatment. Treatment may be very focused on a specific area that contains active trigger points that are causing the headache to a full body relaxation massage when stress reduction is indicated to education of how to stretch certain muscles and maintain a healthy posture during daily activities to prevent further headaches.

OTHER TREATMENT METHODS:

As a massage therapist I often find that the best results in eliminating headaches are achieved when massage therapy is used in conjunction with another modality. For example working with a personal trainer or Pilates instructor to reprogram incorrect postural habits while doing daily activities allows for a great reduction of stress on the musculoskeletal system thereby reducing headaches that may be caused by trigger points. Another example may be working with our traditional Chinese medicine doctor to address any dysfunction causing hormonal imbalances, digestive problems, or sleeping problems all of which may contribute to headaches.

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