

# Headaches

There are many types of headache. The most common type of headache that can be helped with physiotherapy is called cervicogenic headache. This means that the cause of the headache is damage or stress on the neck (cervical spine). The main causes of cervicogenic headache are trauma such as falls or motor vehicle accidents, poor sitting postures such as prolonged typing at a computer, and other disease processes that affect joints such as arthritis.

The cause of cervicogenic headaches is often overlooked as the patient may not complain of any neck pain. The headache often does not respond as expected to the usual medications prescribed for the relief of pain in headaches.

Physiotherapy can help manage headache in a number of ways.

1. Your physiotherapist does an assessment of the spine. If the pain is reproduced or increased with specific movements, especially of the neck, then the problem is probably from the neck or spine.
2. Your physiotherapist can also tell the difference between a cervicogenic headache and other types of headache, such as migraine and stress tension headache. These headaches sometimes overlap with the symptoms of cervicogenic headache and it is important to get the appropriate treatment for the particular headache you have.
3. Your physiotherapist can provide relevant and effective treatment for the cervicogenic headache.

Recent physiotherapy research has shown that the most effective way to manage a cervicogenic headache is by combining exercises designed to improve posture and strengthen the muscles that support the spine, with mobilisation and manipulation to the joints of the neck. This treatment produces excellent short term and long term results, significantly reducing the number of headaches patients get, and how long patients feel the headache.

Your physiotherapist will also provide education about your work environment and other factors that might cause your headaches.

Some physiotherapists also practise acupuncture, which can be successful in treating tension-type headaches and migraines.

## Reference

Jull, G., Trott, P., Potter, H., Zito, G., Niere, K., Emberson, J., et al. (2002). A randomised control trial of physiotherapy management of cervicogenic headache. *Spine*, 27, 1835-1843.