

Changing habits may prevent headaches

By Mandy Kendall

I remember a lot of my chiropractic patients' complaints centered around headaches and their causes varied from case to case.

The majority of headache cases that I treated could be generally attributed to muscular and emotional tension. These were most commonly classified as tension type headaches and were, for the most part, lifestyle related and not life threatening.

The World Health Organization states that 'tension type headache (TTH) alone affects two-thirds of adult males and more than 80 percent of females and that 3,000 migraine attacks occur every day for each million of the general population. Less well recognized is the toll of chronic daily headaches: up to one adult in 20 has a headache every or nearly every day.



Mandy
Kendall

There can be a number of factors contributing to headaches, many of which can be alleviated with a change in lifestyle.

Here are some *Qwik-e* tips to help rule out the cause of, and alleviate the frequency and severity of headaches;

Hydration – A frequent contributor to headaches is dehydration. Caffeine can also lead to headaches, especially during caffeine withdrawal, (although thankfully these are short lived and stop once the body has adjusted to having less caffeine). Before reaching for painkillers try a couple of large glasses of water to rehydrate the body (and the brain more importantly).

Eat regularly – Your brain needs oxygen and glucose to function, so low blood sugar can trigger headaches for some people. Try eating unprocessed foods little and often to see if that helps reduce your headaches. If you tend to wake with a headache, try eating a piece of fruit before going to bed (rather than fruit juice which can spike blood sugar levels and then drop again) and drinking a large glass of water upon waking.

Muscle tension – Strong muscles run up the back of the neck and up over your head. Tension in these muscles from poor posture and/or overuse can cause headaches through the compressive nature of tight muscles. For example, working on a laptop for prolonged periods can cause the head to be held in a tilted-down position and cause the muscles at the back of the neck and head to be overused. To release tension try this *Qwik-e* stretch every 30 minutes; sit up straight, hang your arms loosely by your sides, gently let your head lower forward as if you were trying to rest your chin on your chest. Breathe deeply five or six times (letting your head sink down a little further with each exhale). A warm pad placed around the shoulders and the base of the neck before this stretch will also help release the tension in the muscles.

Emotional tension – In the same way that mechanical overuse of muscles can cause tension, emotional issues can cause muscles to tighten in much the same way. During times of emotional stress, some simple deep breathing may help to dissipate muscle and emotional tension. Repeating accepting on the in-breath and releasing on the out-breath will help to deepen the

relaxing effect.

Trauma – Physical trauma to the body can affect the alignment of your spine, which in turn can cause increased muscle tension and decreased nerve function. A common side effect of many accidents can be ongoing headaches. Consult a healthcare professional who deals with body alignment (a Chiropractor for example) to rule out misalignments that may be a factor in causing the headaches.

Environmental – For some people artificial lighting can be the cause of headaches. Flickering neon tube lighting or even the imperceptible flickering on a computer screen can trigger headaches. Try and assess whether you only get headaches in certain places and eliminate the possibility that lighting could be a factor.

Foods – Many foods such as chocolate and caffeine can be contributors to headaches, as well as preservatives and additives in foods. We know it is common for people to have intolerance for food types such as wheat, dairy and gluten, but intolerance to chemicals added to foods often goes undetected. Try totally avoiding processed foods for at least a week (along with drinking plenty of water) to monitor any affect on the severity and number of headaches.

Medications – Some medications are known to cause headaches (and don't forget the contraceptive pill is considered a medication). Check the list of side effects of any medications you are taking and consult your doctor to see if there might be a better version for you to try.

Allergies – Especially those that affect the sinus area can be a major contributing factor to headaches. Taking local honey during the pollen season can be very effective at reducing your body's inflammatory response to local pollens etc. Being tested for allergies could help determine if they are a factor in your frequent headaches.

Important note – Discuss any concern over headaches with a healthcare professional. Especially if they are severe in nature, last for long periods of time, are associated with vomiting, a temperature, cause changes in vision, a strong aversion to light and/or a stiff and painful neck. Any headache associated with any kind of trauma to the body should also be reported to a healthcare professional.

Until next time.

Mandy Kendall operates Health Connective in South Lake Tahoe, which aligns wellness seekers with their ideal wellness provider. If you have questions, would like some advice, or would like to request some Qwik-e tips on any health and well-being topic, drop her an email at connect@healthconnective.com or keep an eye out on Lake Tahoe News for regular Qwik-e tips on how to make healthy changes one Quick and Easy step at a time.