

Lets look at Headaches.

By David Hall, Qualified Massage Therapist



Massage therapists are often called on to treat people who suffer regular headaches.

One of the hardest direct questions the therapist is often asked by these patients is "what's causing my headaches."

The question is almost like saying, "How long is a piece of string."

There are so many possible or probable answers that immediately and accurately pinpointing a specific cause may be like finding a needle in a haystack.

So headaches can be a real pain in the neck, literally and figuratively speaking, for both the therapist and patient.

But the fact the pain can often be momentarily relieved by pressing into muscles in the neck, base of the skull, temples and forehead is a good clue that muscular tension may be responsible.

Pain Signal.

This pressure interrupts the pain nerve signal from these muscles to the brain.

Headaches are often simply the result of a stressful day, causing various muscles and fascia to tighten and blood vessels to constrict. As a result there can be reduced blood supply to the brain and a build-up of toxins.

While headaches can often be easily relieved with a mild headache tablet, if they won't go away, occur on a regular basis or a pill doesn't fix them quickly, it's well worth trying a remedial massage.

There can be many causes of headaches - dehydration, hormonal or circulation problems, sinus inflammation, pre-menstrual tension, chemical imbalances, allergies, blood pressure, constipation, bowel toxicity, eye strain, head injuries/trauma and cervical and jaw misalignments, to name just a few.

Some of these could even be pointers to more serious medical problems that may require medical attention.

Very often, however, headaches are a SYMPTOM of muscle imbalances SOMEWHERE in the body and can be successfully treated with massage for long-term relief.

If you've read any of my previous articles about massage, you'll be aware even some of the above-mentioned less obvious causes of headaches also can be relieved with massage.

This is because massage also promotes better circulation of blood, lymphatic fluid and oxygen, with consequent improvement in the body's immune system and other organs. Massage helps detoxify the body.

Contributing Factors.

If you regularly suffer any of the three types of headaches - muscle contraction, tension or migraine - there's a strong chance tight muscles apart from just those in your neck and shoulders are a contributing factor.

Here's just a few of many possible examples:

Rounded shoulders tend to pull the neck and head forward. When this happens, muscles at the back of the neck from the base of the skull to the top of the shoulders are in a constant state of contraction to tilt the head back on top of the neck - basically so you can look straight ahead rather than stay staring at the ground.

Tight pectoralis (chest) muscles are usually the main cause of rounded shoulders.

Stand in front of the mirror in a very relaxed way with your hands hanging loosely by your sides. If you notice one shoulder and/or one hip is slightly lower than the other, this is a strong indication of other significant muscular imbalances needing treatment.

Tight or sore leg muscles, perhaps after you've been working at a desk or standing on a concrete floor all day, can be a sign of hip misalignment.

This in turn pulls your spine out of proper alignment - right up to the cervical vertebrae supporting your skull. You often feel the tension in your neck and shoulders.

By correcting muscular imbalances elsewhere with massage, you remove the initial cause of the tension in neck and shoulders, and therefore can often stop muscle-related headaches occurring.

Scenarios.

If any of the following scenarios fits your circumstances, one or more massages could prevent or relieve headaches without the need for any medication.

A job where you work at a computer most of the day. Repetitive work with movement of the arm and shoulder contributes muscles tightening and neck tension.

Regular lower back or hip pain can indicate a range of muscular problems affecting your spine. These could be pulling your thoracic (upper back) and cervical (neck) vertebrae out of alignment.

A kyphosis posture (larger than normal curve in your upper spine), which pulls your head forward.

Your jaw clicks or you grind your teeth. These are usually symptoms of tight neck, jaw and other facial muscles pulling the jaw out of alignment, which is often incorrectly assumed to be a dental problem.

Shortness of breath for no obvious reason (even if you're fairly fit). Your ribcage may be distorted due to muscular imbalances in the spine and elsewhere, preventing your lungs completely filling or emptying of air.

High stress levels due to family, work or financial problems or responsibilities. Stress often manifests itself as muscle tension.

Medications like aspirin, paracetamol or stronger drugs often provide quick or short-term relief of headaches.

Pills may be all you need. But if you get re-occurring headaches you should look at other treatment options.

Even one thorough remedial massage is often all you need.

Dehydration.

As mentioned earlier in this article, dehydration is one of the many causes of headaches. It is perhaps the major generic cause of headaches but is often the least obvious because people often don't know they are dehydrated.

Before you try ANY other form of treatment for headaches, you should drink lots of plain water (not tea, coffee, Coke, beer, etc - just **water**).

If you'd like more information on remedial, relaxation or lymphatic drainage massage - all three of which are ideal for headaches, call one of our qualified therapists today.

