

Chronic Headaches

Headaches come in many forms (tension, migraine, cluster, etc.) and have many different causes. Some stem from postural imbalances, tension, and muscle spasms, some from environmental allergies and sinus congestion. Poor nutrition, and food intolerances can also cause or contribute to headaches.¹⁻⁴

Common food triggers for headaches include wheat and other gluten containing grains, chocolate, caffeine cheese, citrus fruits, hot dogs, monosodium glutamate, aspartame, Splenda®, ice cream, caffeine, and alcoholic beverages. Additionally, certain chemicals in processed foods (marinades, soy sauce, lunch meats, etc.) can trigger a neuro chemical release in the brain that causes the onset of headache.⁴ Finding potentiating foods for headaches can often times be difficult because the onset of symptoms does not always occur immediately after eating the trigger food. Successful treatment for food induced headaches is dependent on identifying the culprit factor. A number of laboratory tests can be employed to help find food based triggers.

Muscle tension, stress, sedentary lifestyle, and excessive computer work all contribute to muscle spasm in the neck and shoulders. Chronic spasms can lead to long term postural changes that con-

tribute to and cause headaches. When headaches are caused by postural problems, muscular imbalances, and joint restrictions, chiropractic treatment is very effective.⁵ Recent research points out that chiropractic care is one of the most efficacious treatments for headaches and chronic neck pain when compared to other forms of treatment.^{6,7}

In cases where nutritional deficiencies are present, supplementation can be very beneficial. Headaches can be related to a variety of different nutrient deficiencies including, magnesium, riboflavin, vitamin B-12, CoQ10, water, and many more.^{8,9} Because the standard American diet is full of nutrient depleted, chemical laden, processed foods, nutritional deficiencies are common. Proper laboratory testing should be performed to rule out nutrient deficiencies as a contributing factor to headaches.

There are a variety of over the counter medications that can be taken to alleviate headache pain. However, none of these medications address the actual cause of the headache. In addition, a number of them can have unwanted side effects such as stomach ulceration and bleeding as well as decreased liver and kidney function. When taken on a regular basis, many headache medicines can also cause deficiencies of nutrients like vitamin C,

CoQ10, folic acid, and potassium. Long term medication use for the treatment of chronic headaches is rarely necessary if a thorough diagnostic work up is performed.

Remember that it is important to have headaches evaluated by a professional because they can be symptoms of deeper and in some cases, life threatening problems. There are a number of factors that contribute to the onset of headaches. I have seen cases where patients actually suffered with 3 types of headaches at the same time. Accurate headache assessment cannot be accomplished in a 10 minute office visit; it takes time for the doctor to be able to ask the right questions as well as assess the history of the patient, and determine what types of tests (if any) need to be performed to aid in the proper diagnosis.

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