[IMAGE]

Headaches: Drugless Solutions

By Julie Engebretson

Looking for an effective solution to those nagging headaches without all the side effects associated with medications? Try chiropractic care.

Blame it on stress, poor sleep or genes, headaches are a painful part of life for many Americans. Severe, chronic headache is one of the most common sources of pain, interfering with the ability to enjoy social activities and lessening quality of life.

It is estimated that 15 percent of adults in the United States suffer from chronic migraines or severe headache pain. Better illustrated, in a room of six people, it is likely that at least one person is popping aspirin, acetaminophen or something stronger. But are drugs really the best way to treat headache pain?

Headache sufferers spend billions each year on over-the-counter and prescription pain medication for relief. But these drugs have the potential to cause even more pain. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), a class of medications that includes commonly used pain relievers such as Advil, Motrin, Aleve and Excedrin, have been associated with side effects ranging from stomach bleeding and ulcers to decreased kidney and liver function or failure. In fact, headaches are a potential side effect of several NSAIDs! And yet so many Americans remain trapped inside capsule after tiny capsule of temporary relief, at best, masking the problem and ignoring the risk. Isn’t it time for a little more cure and a lot less risk?

A Nervous Condition?

Woman with tension headache. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Over the years, a number of theories have emerged as to the origin of headaches. We know there are many triggers. Toxic fumes, cigarette smoke and ingesting certain foods probably top the list of headache triggers. But the exact cause or causes are still unknown. Until a few years ago, researchers believed headache pain to be caused by muscle contraction in the face, neck and scalp, as the result of heightened emotions, tension or stress. However, more recent studies negate this theory. It is now more commonly believed that headache may result from changes among certain brain chemicals - serotonin, endorphins and many other chemicals, including nitric oxide, that help the nervous system to "communicate" properly. These chemical changes and the subsequent

interference of nerve transmission are thought to ignite pain pathways to the brain and to disrupt the brain's ability to dull the pain.

Chiropractic: The Drugless Solution

Over-the-counter and prescription painkillers attempt to mask or diminish symptoms only by way of the bloodstream, or circulatory system. But chiropractic digs deeper, to the *cause* of symptoms. According to *Gray's Anatomy* [the medical manual, not the popular television show], the nervous system is the "master system" in the body, controlling and coordinating all other systems - respiratory, immune and even circulatory.

If you're suffering from frequent headaches, bring this concern to your chiropractor's attention. It is your doctor's responsibility to locate and correct areas in the spine where one or more of the vertebrae may have experienced a loss of function, creating pressure on, or otherwise irritating, spinal nerves. This irritation interferes with the signals, or "communication," traveling over those nerves, which can compromise the health of every system in the body.

By positively affecting the nervous system and aiding nerve transmission, chiropractic care, in the form of specific spinal "adjustments" or "manipulations," improves the body's own ability to heal itself. Chiropractic adjustments help restore normal joint function in your spine, thus alleviating nerve pressure and loss of nerve flow.

What Kind Of Headache Do I Have?

With so many "types" of headaches with varying degrees of severity and frequency, affecting every area of the head, you may find yourself at a loss for words when describing your condition to the doctor. The image on the next page matches five of the most common headache types with their corresponding symptoms/causes.

Illustration of different types of headaches. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark What type of headaches do you suffer from? Here are five of the more common headache types, along with their characteristic symptoms/causes. Research evidence suggests chiropractic is an effective, natural answer to headache pain. In fact, in a major 1995 study comparing several weeks of drug therapy to several weeks of chiropractic care, 82 percent of patients given drug therapy reported side effects including drowsiness, weight gain and dry mouth. Heart-related problems and glaucoma also were associated with the drug

therapy. On the other hand, chiropractic patients reported no side effects. And after four weeks of treatment, patients who used drugs began having headaches again, while members of the chiropractic group continued to express headache relief, as well as higher levels of energy as compared to the drug therapy group.

"When the bones of the spine lose their normal position or motion, the sensitive nerves and blood vessels to the head become compromised. When these delicate tissues are stretched or irritated, they can produce certain types of headaches," explains Claudia Daude, DC, who maintains a chiropractic practice in Michigan and has a great deal of experience treating headache sufferers. "While aspirin or other medications may cover up the symptoms, they do not really correct the cause of the headache. This is why many people have found relief from headaches through regular chiropractic care."

Depending on your particular type of headache, your chiropractor may choose to utilize any or all of these treatment options, along with specific spinal adjustments. So put down the pain-relief medications and take a natural, drug-free approach to getting rid of those nagging headaches.

Diet/nutrition: Evidence suggests combinations of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids may reduce the severity, frequency and duration of migraines, while magnesium supplementation may reduce both the frequency and severity of migraine attacks. High doses of vitamin B_2 (called riboflavin) also may reduce the number and strength of migraines.

Good sources of omega-3 and omega-6 fats are fish, fish oil supplements, and flaxseed oil, while magnesium can be found in dark green vegetables, nuts and seeds, and soy flour. Supplementation is probably necessary to ensure high intake of vitamin B2; however, good food sources include poultry and fish.

Exercise: Regular exercise relaxes your muscles and increases levels of beta-endorphin, one of the body’s natural stress relievers. Less stress and more relaxation certainly can’t hurt when you’re dealing with headache pain.

Herbs: Extracts of feverfew, a small bush with citrus-scented leaves, have been used for years to control migraines. The active components in feverfew have been shown to possess anti-inflammatory properties; less inflammation, particularly of blood vessels, may mean less headaches. These extracts also can be found in a spray. Ask your doctor before taking feverfew if you are pregnant or may become pregnant.

Special Pillows/Mattresses: You spend as much as one-third of your life in bed. Your pillow and mattress have the potential to aggravate the alignment of your spine and create stiffness in your muscles. Poor mattresses and pillows can result in neck pain and headaches. Your doctor can recommend pillows and mattresses that will give your head, neck and spine the support they need.

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