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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Headaches

Many people do not realize that headaches are the second most common reason for a person to visit a health care practitioner. There are different types of headaches but the one we are discussing today is usually referred to as a "cervicogenic headache". These are most commonly due to three possible problems. The first is tight muscles in the neck and shoulders. The second is when the joints in the neck lose their mobility or flexibility and become stiff and sore, and lastly, when the nerves in the upper neck become irritated or pinched. Any one of these three or combinations of all of them can potentially cause headaches at the forehead, eyes, temples, or back of the head. Stress can play a major role in amplifying these preexisting problems. However, it is not just stress that can make matters worse. Poor posture while sitting or standing at work can also make these headaches more severe.

Very commonly in Chiropractic practice, patients come to see us for relief of their headaches. They are most commonly due to the joints of the neck being stiff, sore, and inflamed. When this happens, the nerves that are closely positioned to the inflamed joints also become involved. They eventually become mildly irritated and refer pain to the neck, shoulder and head. The neighboring muscles in the upper neck also become very tight, further restricting the movement of the neck. The following diagrams (Foreman, Croft. Whiplash Injuries. 2nd ed, Williams & Wilkens, 1988) demonstrate where the pain is typically referred.



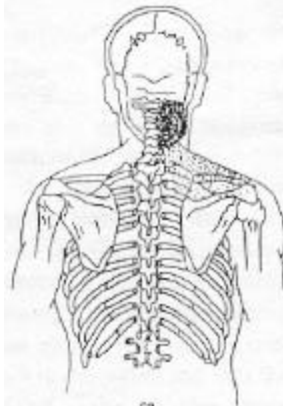
C1

Pain pattern when the first nerve in the neck is irritated.



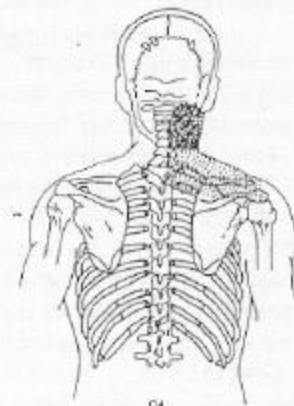
C2

Pain pattern when the third nerve in the neck is irritated.



C3

Pain pattern when the second nerve in the neck is irritated.



C4

Pain pattern when the fourth nerve in the neck is irritated.

If you are experiencing ongoing dull achey pain in any of the patterns shown above, you are likely suffering from cervicogenic headaches. It has been very well researched that these problems respond well to conservative care if treated properly. However, it is also very important that if your headaches are worse than you have ever experienced before, cause dizziness or blurred vision, or if they continue to get worse no matter what you do, get into see a health care professional right away.