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

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## Suffering From Headaches?

If you have a headache, you're not alone. Nine out of ten Canadians suffer from headaches. Some are occasional, some frequent, some are dull and throbbing, and some cause debilitating pain and nausea.

Assuming you do suffer from headaches, what do you do when it happens? Do you grit your teeth and carry on? Lie down? Pop a pill and hope the pain goes away? There is a better alternative. But first, you need to know what is causing the pain.

Headaches have many causes. One is diet - for instance, too much chocolate or monosodium glutamate (MSG - a common "flavor enhancer"). Five percent of them are there because a potentially serious "disease state" is present. The other ninety-five percent of headaches are primary headaches, such as tension, migraine, or cluster headaches. These types of headaches are not caused by "disease". The headache itself is the problem.

Once it is determined that your headaches are not from the serious "disease state", there are steps you should take to help prevent or eliminate your pain.

- If you spend a large amount of time in one fixed position, such as in front of a computer, on a sewing machine, typing or reading, take a break and stretch every 30 minutes to one hour and perform a short series of stretches. Examples of stretches for your neck can be found on my website ([www.merrittchiro.com](http://www.merrittchiro.com)).
- Low-impact exercise may help relieve the pain associated with primary headaches. However, if you are prone to dull, throbbing headaches, avoid heavy exercise. Engage in such activities as walking and low-impact aerobics.
- Avoid teeth clenching. The upper teeth should never touch the lowers, except when swallowing. Clenching your teeth when sleeping or during the day results in tension in the muscles around the temporomandibular joints (TMJ- the two joints that connect your jaw to your skull) which will lead to tension headaches.

- Drink at least eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day to help avoid dehydration, which can cause to headaches. Yes, this is one of the reasons you get a headache the morning after indulging in too much alcohol.

- Avoid caffeine. Foods such as chocolate, coffee, sodas and cocoa contain high levels of the caffeine stimulant.

- Avoid foods with a high salt or sugar content. These foods may cause migraines, resulting in sensitivity to light, noise, or abrupt movements.

- If you suffer from tension headaches, avoid not only caffeine, but also high-protein foods, dairy products, red meat and salty foods.

If you are suffering from some of the more common causes of headaches, your chiropractor can help you using the following methods:

- Perform spinal manipulation or adjustment to loosen the muscles and joints, as well as release any potential irritation of the nerves that exit the spine.

- Provide nutritional advice, recommending a change in diet and perhaps the addition of B complex vitamins.

- Offer advice on posture, exercise and stretching, which will help relieve the tension in the muscles of the upper back.

Finally, if your headache is symptomatic of a health problem that needs the care of another discipline, your chiropractor will refer you accordingly.