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

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## Chiropractic vs. Medication for Headaches

Besides low back and neck pain, headaches are likely the next most common complaint that brings a person to a chiropractor's office. There are many different causes of headaches, some more serious than others. However, the most common type of headache is known as a "tension-type" or "cervicogenic". This type of headache is caused by irritation of the joints and/or nerves in the upper neck, resulting in chronic muscle tension in the neighbouring muscles. I know firsthand how much chiropractic care can help people with this type of headache, but good research is being done to scientifically prove how well it works.

I am proud to say that the chiropractic profession has been performing quality research studies demonstrating to their patients and the medical community just how well chiropractic treatment can help people with headaches. I will list a couple of them below:

**1) The efficacy of spinal manipulation, amitriptyline and the combination of both therapies for prophylaxis of migraine headache.** Nelson CF, Bronfort G, Evans R, et al. **J Manipulative Physiol Ther. 1998 (Oct); 21 (8): 511-519**

This study compared the relative effectiveness of treating migraines by with chiropractic care alone, with the antidepressant/antianxiety drug amitriptyline (best known under the brand name Elavil); and with a combination of both the drug therapy and chiropractic care. Patients who received only chiropractic showed significant improvement, on a par with those given the powerful prescription drug (though without the side effects). The headache index, from a diary kept by each patient, showed chiropractic treatment reduced the severity and frequency of headaches as well or better than the combined therapy (chiropractic and amitriptyline together) or amitriptyline alone at each stage of the study.

**2) The effect of spinal manipulation in the treatment of cervicogenic headache.** Nilsson N, Christensen HW, Hartvigsen J. **J Manipulative Physiol Ther. 1997 (Jun); 20 (5): 326-330**

This is a randomized controlled trial performed at the University of Odense, Denmark by chiropractors and medical doctors. Fifty-three patients suffering from frequent cervicogenic headaches were recruited. Twenty-eight members of the group received cervical manipulation twice a week for three weeks. The remaining 25 received low-level laser in the upper cervical region and deep friction massage in the lower cervical/upper thoracic region, also twice a week for three weeks.

The use of analgesics by the patients to reduce their headache symptoms decreased by 36% in the manipulation group, but was unchanged in the soft-tissue group. The number of headache hours per day decreased by 69% in the manipulation group compared with 37% in the soft-tissue group. Finally, the headache intensity per episode decreased by 36% in the manipulation group, compared with 17% in the soft-tissue group.

**3) Spinal manipulation vs. Amitriptyline for the treatment of chronic tension-type headaches: a randomized clinical trial.** Boline PD, Kasaak K, Bronfort G, Nelson C, Anderson AV, **J Manipulative Physiol Ther. 1995 (Mar-Apr); 18 (3): 148-154**

Six weeks of drug therapy were compared to six weeks of chiropractic adjustments for the treatment of chronic “tension-type” headaches. The drug therapy (amitriptyline) was considered slightly more effective than chiropractic however 82% of the patients taking the drugs had side effects that included drowsiness, weight gain and dry mouth. Cardiac problems and glaucoma were also associated with amitriptyline use. Chiropractic patients had no side effects (apart from slight neck stiffness in the first two weeks of the study in 5% of the patients). After four weeks, chiropractic and drug therapy was halted in both groups. The patients who used drugs began having headaches again while the chiropractic group continued to express headache relief, as well as higher levels of energy and vitality than the drug therapy group.

If you do suffer from tension-type or cervicogenic headaches, it is imperative that you eliminate the cause of the headache through chiropractic rather than simply trying to eliminate the pain with medications. If you have any questions on how chiropractic care may help you eliminate your headaches, feel free to call my office.

**Just a reminder that Merritt’s newest chiropractor, Dr. Dean Bortolon, is now working Tuesday and Saturday mornings at Nicola Valley Chiropractic.**