

Dr. Colin Gage

Nicola Valley Chiropractic
2076A Granite Ave.
P.O. Box 909
Merritt, BC
V1K 1B8

Ph: (250) 378-5456
Fax: (250) 378-8259
Email: info@merrittchiro.com
Website: www.merrittchiro.com

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

Do You Get “Tension Headaches”?

It is estimated that 75% to 90% of all persons who complain of chronic or frequent headaches suffer from tension headaches. They are the most common type of primary headache, and while they share some characteristics with the more serious migraine, they also display certain distinct differences that set them apart.

When a patient is examined, there are often findings of muscle and neck joint tenderness. There is typically neck joint (facet joints) stiffness/irritation and muscle spasm/tension in the areas of the neck, at the base of the skull, and shoulders. The scalp and forehead may also be painful when palpated. Standard medical testing of the nerves, brain, and spinal cord usually finds no abnormalities.

Like migraines, tension headaches seem to be more common in women than in men. Unlike migraines, which often make their initial appearance during adolescence, tension headaches usually begin in middle age. However, I have treated many children with this type of headache. In adults, the onset often is equated with the development of adult stresses, anxieties and depression that can characterize mid-life. Physical stresses such as poor posture, sitting all day at a computer, and heavy physical labour can also contribute to the problem. The name "tension headache" therefore can be said to describe an overall response by the body to emotional and physical strains and pressures

Many researchers, chiropractors, and medical doctors still believe strongly that physical and emotional stress-induced muscular tension in the head, neck, and shoulders can bring on tension headaches. This is supported by evidence of muscular tenderness in areas of the neck, the base of the skull, scalp, forehead, face, jaw, shoulders or upper arms in many tension-type headache sufferers.

The typical tension headache is one that produces a dull, steady, achy pain on both sides of the head. This contrasts with the classic symptom of migraine, which is severe, throbbing or pulsating pain, usually on one side of the head. However, a small proportion of tension-headache patients report that their pain, when at its worst, does at times develop a pulsating quality or only appear on one side of the head. Many tension headache sufferers describe their pain as producing a sensation of pressure or tightness around the head, as though a band were

pulled tightly around it. Others compare the feeling to having their head clamped in an ever-tightening vise. The pain usually begins gradually and increases steadily over a period of hours, but while severe and distracting, it rarely becomes overwhelming and physically debilitating, as in a migraine.

A chiropractor is thoroughly trained to examine a person with headaches in order to eliminate other serious underlying problems that may be the cause of their symptoms. If needed, an appropriate referral would be made. In most situations, the headache is caused by stiff and dysfunctional joints in the neck. These joints become easily inflamed, which irritates the neighbouring nerves, leading to pain and muscle spasm. This scenario eventually leads to what people feel as a “tension-type headache”

Many people with tension headaches do not seek medical attention or advice, instead choosing to treat themselves with nonprescription analgesics and over-the-counter pain medications. Although this will often eliminate the symptoms, it does nothing to correct the cause of the headache. Therefore, it is just a matter of time before the headache returns. Continually taking drugs for the headaches symptoms is definitely not the answer, as this can cause other serious side effects - "rebound headaches" and severe gastrointestinal and cardiovascular damage.

Chiropractic treatment consists of restoring the normal functioning of the joints within the neck. When this is accomplished, the joints are able to heal themselves and the neighbouring nerves will no longer be irritated. Typically, the muscle spasm and pain subsides relatively quickly. Most importantly, the cause of the headache is being safely treated rather than just addressing the symptoms. The chiropractor may also discuss modifying how you do physical things at home or work, as well as perhaps increasing the amount of exercise the person does.

If you have headaches, see your chiropractor for help. There is no need to live your life in a state of suffering.