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

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## Not Tonight, I Have a Headache

Did you know that one of the top reasons why someone visits their doctor is because of headaches? Even headaches of moderate severity can prevent you from enjoying many “fun” activities that life has to offer. In fact, in my practice, the number children, teenagers, and adults who are seeking chiropractic care for relief of headaches is right up there with neck or back pain. Yet, it still surprises me that most of these people do not know that the headaches they are experiencing are primarily “tension-type headaches”, and not “migraines”

Tension-type headaches are the most common, yet the easiest to treat, type of headache. Muscle tension, joint stiffness, and nerve irritation at the back of the neck and head can create a dull, steady pain over the forehead, temples and the back of neck. Commonly, there is a band-like pressure on both sides of the head. The pain is usually constant, non-throbbing, ranges from mild to moderate in severity, and usually builds in intensity. It is very common for people to even wake up in the morning and feel the headache before even getting out of bed! Tension headaches may last from 30 minutes to several days, and are commonly related to stress, poor posture, and a lack of regular physical exercise. They affect both men and women in equal numbers, and are common in children. They can cause nausea and are not made worse by routine physical activity.

Studies have shown that more than 70 percent of people who experience this type of headache also had frequent disrupted sleep due to the associated neck stiffness or pain. In addition, these people reported that, over time, this scenario created further fatigue and headache-related anxiety or stress. The same studies also found that forty-four percent of the people who experience this type of headache said that it affected their performance at work or school and 72 percent said the pain caused them to miss work or school an average of 3.5 days in the last six months.

Over the past few years, research has shown that spinal manipulation - the primary form of treatment provided by Chiropractors - is an effective treatment option for tension-type headaches and headaches that originate from the neck. For example, a report released in 2001 by researchers at the Duke University Evidence-Based Practice Center in Durham, NC, found that spinal manipulation resulted in almost immediate improvement for those headaches that originate in the neck, and had significantly fewer side effects and longer-

lasting relief of tension-type headache than a commonly prescribed medication. Also, a 1995 study in the *Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics* found that spinal manipulative therapy was an effective treatment for tension headaches and that those who ceased chiropractic treatment after four weeks experienced a sustained therapeutic benefit in contrast with those patients who received a commonly prescribed medication. In addition to chiropractic treatment, anyone who suffers from neck stiffness or headaches should be stretching their neck muscles daily, the ergonomics of their place of work should be reviewed to prevent poor posture, and they should participate in some form of regular physical activity. For more information on headaches, neck pain, and free examples of neck stretches/exercises, visit our website at [www.merritchiro.com](http://www.merritchiro.com).

On a final note, if you are experiencing severe headaches that are worse than you have ever had before, dizziness, facial numbness, slurred speech, or altered vision, go to the hospital immediately to rule out more severe sources of headache. This is particularly true if you have a history of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or stroke in your family.