

Relief from headaches and migraines

By Russell Purchon
Doctor of Chiropractic



About the author

Russell first experienced chiropractic when it helped him overcome back pain in 2001. The fact that a chiropractor could get such good results using just their hands, without drugs or surgery, made a strong impression on him so he decided to retrain as a chiropractor. It took four years - in 2007 he graduated with a degree in chiropractic from the University of Glamorgan. He's been at Hexham Family Chiropractic since 2010 and is the owner of the clinic.

He has a keen interest in how chiropractic helps the body's performance and has worked with many sports people including Championship and Premiership football players. A father of two, Russell also has considerable skills in using chiropractic to help pregnant women and children.

Russell's mission is to help people get back to the active, healthy lifestyle they have lost or are in danger of losing.

A great first step

Recurrent headaches can feel debilitating because they can come at any time. Unexplained migraines are especially stressful. ***It's great that you've decided to do some research and take positive action about your health.*** Downloading this guide is a great place to start.

What do chiropractors know about headaches?

Chiropractors are specialists in spinal health - what isn't well known is that we can often help with headaches too. The body is an integrated mechanism, and a practitioner with in depth knowledge of how it all ties together is in a good position to identify what's causing your headaches. If postural strain is causing (or contributing to) your headaches, then chiropractic adjustments can bring relief.



How does postural strain cause headaches?

One type of headache - Cervicogenic headache - arises from problems with neck function often caused by postural strain. I'm going to begin this document by listing the four most common causes of postural strain and what you can do to help your body heal. In the second part I'm going to explain six other factors which can lead to headaches.

Think about which factors apply to you and bear in mind that persistent headaches are often multi-factorial.

Four common causes of postural strain

1. Poor stance

Your head is as heavy as a bowling ball. If you are carrying that around on top of your shoulders in the wrong way every day - what is doing going to do to all those muscles, joints, ligaments and nerves in that area?

What you should do-

Make sure when you are sitting or standing, you relax your shoulders back and down, stretching your head to the top of the ceiling. Tuck your chin in slightly and see if you can get your ear lobe in line with the tip of your shoulder. That's the right position for your head to be. To encourage this type of posture, try this exercise: tuck your chin into your neck, keeping it parallel with the floor, and make a double chin (fun exercise at work while others are watching!) - hold this for 5 seconds and repeat 10 times. That activates those postural muscles at the back of your neck, so they can do the right job properly again.

2. Technology and screens

Hours spent in front of a computer, slouched on a couch, looking down at your iPad or iPhone - all of these contribute to increased stress on your neck, possibly leading to your headaches and migraines.

What you should do-

When using your phone or tablet, try bringing it up to eye level to reduce to force going through your neck. Make sure you are holding your phone to your ear correctly when making phone calls, and not bending your neck to the side to hold it there between your ear and shoulder - better yet, use a headset. And lastly, when using your computer, make sure you bring the top of your computer screen up to eye level. You can do this by buying a laptop/computer lifter to adjust the screen or simply place some books underneath it.

3. Poor sleeping position

Did you know you spend one third of your life in bed? Having the correct sleeping position is critical to good alignment of your spine. Sleeping in a natural and neutral position, maintaining the normal curve of your spine is paramount to good alignment. Sleeping on your stomach is the worst position for your spine as this places your neck in an unnatural bend and increased stress on your lower back!

What you should do-

Make sure your pillow supports the natural curve of your neck. Natural fill pillows might feel comfortable to start, but lose their shape within 30 minutes to an hour! Choose a supportive pillow which is the right thickness for your body - **this** article talks you through how you can work that out.

4. Heavy asymmetrical bags

Humans are creatures of habit - so most of us, when carrying our bags or cases, are always carrying them over the same shoulder, creating repetitive stress to the neck and shoulder. Your bag should not exceed more than 10% of your body weight. When it goes over this weight it places stresses and strain through your head, neck and shoulders - leading to pain and headaches.

What you should do-

Check the weight of your bag before leaving the house and remove any unnecessary items. When carrying a bag with short straps, sling it over your shoulder and tuck the purse under your arm close to your body. When carrying a bag with long straps, sling it over the opposite shoulder to help the shoulders relax. This way your shoulders won't contract to prevent the bag from falling. Try and switch shoulders every so often to prevent repetitive strain.

"I had prolonged tension headaches and a really tight neck and shoulders. Russell gave a full assessment and after the first treatment alone the difference was noticeable. Further treatments have now totally cleared my symptoms and the difference is just brilliant."

Gareth Evans



How I treat headaches

First I conduct a thorough assessment. By analyzing the spine and posture I identify the joints that are restricted and the muscles that are under strain. Among headache sufferers it is common to find forward head posture where the neck angles forward rather than above the shoulders. I then help people to restore the function of their spine through chiropractic adjustments, exercise, postural and ergonomic advice. If you would like to see for yourself what chiropractic care looks like, *our home page* has a little slide show.

What if postural strain isn't to blame? 8 other common causes of headaches.

Chiropractic treatment is recommended for Cervicogenic headaches because it gets results. However, there are other physiological causes of headaches and I list the 8 most common ones below.

1. Stress.

Stress is a crucial factor when it comes to headaches and migraines. In this day and age, we are all living fast paced and chaotic lives - but taking 10 minutes out in your busy schedule can save you hours at the end of the day, especially if it is going to keep that headache away! There are so many meditation and mindfulness apps to download nowadays, from a 2-minute guided meditation for the newbie's, to an hour long one for the more experienced. Many successful business people and athletes have found the benefit of meditation and mindfulness, why not put it into practice in your life today, and watch that stress slip away.

2. Poor diet.

Fasting, eating high sugary meals or processed foods, dieting or skipping meals can all contribute to a sudden drop or spike in your blood sugar levels. This in turn could be the leading cause of your headaches and migraines. Eating small, regular meals that are prepared with natural (organic if possible) ingredients is the best way to keep your blood glucose in check. Avoid overly processed, packaged foods, as the ingredients in them lack the nutrients your body needs. Try replacing refined sugar for healthy alternatives, like organic honey or raw maple syrup. And if you are craving a sweet treat, try reach for some fresh fruit, or a date instead – sweet and sticky and the perfect substitute for those mid-afternoon cravings.

3. Sleep deprivation

Disturbed sleeping patterns and fatigue both can be a major trigger for headaches and migraines. If sleeping has always been troublesome for you, try these tips: lower the lights before bed and avoid looking at a screen (TV, laptop, phone) – this artificial light tricks the body into thinking it's still day time, and so doesn't 'switch-off'. Try some soothing music, or a bedtime meditation, as well as soothing smells (lavender is popular) and teas (such as chamomile).

4. Dehydration

This common trigger for headaches and migraines can easily go undetected. Being dehydrated may not only come from not drinking enough water, but possibly drinking too much caffeine – think coffee, tea and energy drinks. Cut down on these and increase your water intake by drinking, small amounts of water often throughout the day. Your body will thank you for it in more ways than one.

5. Vision issues

When did you last get your eyes tested? It might be that you need to start wearing glasses or get your prescription changed. Headaches caused by eye strain are rare but they usually start after using the eyes for extended periods of time, such as long periods of time using the computer, reading, or even sewing. If the discomfort is caused by eyestrain, then it will be relieved with lenses or by correcting the alignment of the eyes.

6. Sinus problems

Sinusitis can cause headaches. If your headaches are accompanied by a feeling of pressure in the forehead and cheeks, and feel worse when you lean forward, these may indicate that sinusitis is to blame. Sinusitis is usually caused by a virus or less commonly by allergies, tooth infections and nasal polyps.

7. Diabetes

If you are diagnosed with diabetes, be aware that headaches can come and go as your blood sugar fluctuates. Headaches which result from low blood glucose (hypoglycemia) come on suddenly, whereas headaches caused by hyperglycemia (high blood glucose) generally take several days to develop. If you suspect that your headaches might be a sign of diabetes but have not yet been diagnosed, book in with your doctor as a priority.

8. Hormonal fluctuations

Headaches, especially migraine headaches, have been linked to the female hormone estrogen. Estrogen controls chemicals in the brain that affect the sensation of pain, and a drop in estrogen levels can trigger a headache. There are various reasons why your hormone levels may change, including the menstrual cycle, menopause and pregnancy.

Further reading-

If you want to get some exercise but are worried you might injure yourself, read this-

<https://hexhamchiropractic.co.uk/health-advice/health-advice/eight-common-causes-of-injury-and-how-to-avoid-them>

If you would like to read about the evidence base for chiropractic, read this-

<https://chiroup.com/the-top-10-most-impactful-smt-studies-in-the-past-year/>

If you would like to see a chiropractor but are not local to me, read this-

<https://hexhamchiropractic.co.uk/what-is-chiropractic/what-makes-a-good-chiropractor>

**"Chiropractic is generally very safe
when performed correctly by a
trained and registered chiropractor"**



www.nhs.uk

Health Advice Disclaimer

If you are recovering from spinal surgery many of the tips above will still be helpful, but seek advice from a professional before applying them.

We make every effort to ensure that we accurately represent the injury advice and prognosis displayed throughout this guide. However, examples of injuries and their prognosis are based on typical representations of those injuries that we commonly see in our clinics. The information given is not intended as representations of every individual's potential injury. As with any injury, each person's symptoms can vary widely and each person's recovery from injury can also vary depending on background, genetics, previous medical history, application of exercises, posture, motivation to follow advice and various other physical factors. It is impossible to give a 100% complete accurate diagnosis and prognosis without a thorough physical examination and likewise the advice given for management of an injury cannot be deemed accurate in the absence of examination from a General Chiropractic Council Registered Chiropractor. We are able to offer you this service at a standard charge. Significant injury risk is possible if you do not follow due diligence and seek suitable professional advice about your injury. No guarantees of specific results are expressly made or implied in this report.