



Headaches Can Be A Pain In The Neck!

Headaches can result from numerous causes, the most common being associated with neck dysfunction known as Cervicogenic headaches, tension headaches and migraines. Headache types are not always clearly defined and some can be mixed.

What's the difference?

Repeated postures eg slouching or allowing your head to gravitate towards the computer screen results in the joints in the upper part of your neck being closed down and the muscles in the back of your neck becoming short & tight.

In the long term this often results in stiffness in your neck and upper back, joints becoming painful. The nerves emerging from the upper cervical spine also supply the skin of head and face, tongue etc and so when irritated the pain is often felt in the areas the nerves supply – namely the head and face.

Physiotherapy treatment aimed at restoring normal joint mobility, relieving compressive forces and specific exercises can help relieve these headaches.

Tension Headaches: are associated with increased muscle tension in your neck, scalp and jaw which may be aggravated by anxiety, depression, changes to sleep routine, medications, poor posture, lack of physical activity and hormonal changes.

Addressing these issues is likely to have the best results in reducing your headaches – but it may well be worth a visit to your physio to rule out some neck involvement before embarking on numerous tests and medications.

Migraines may be chemically driven and require medical management by your doctor.

Things to do to reduce the incidence of neck related headaches:

- **Stay Active:** go for a walk, swim or play a game of tennis to get your heart rate up and your joints moving. Joints need to move! Otherwise join a Pilates or Yoga class to ensure your joints move through full range 1-2x/week.
- **Reverse your posture regularly:** every hour when studying or working at a desk
- Slide your head back over your body
- Arch your back over the chair
- Rotate in your chair
- Stand and arch your back
- Gently stretch your neck by dropping your shoulders and reach towards the floor

Keep your postural muscles strong:

- Do some exercise to improve your endurance of your upper back. Eg Pilates, or an exercise program with a Swiss Ball or over some pillows



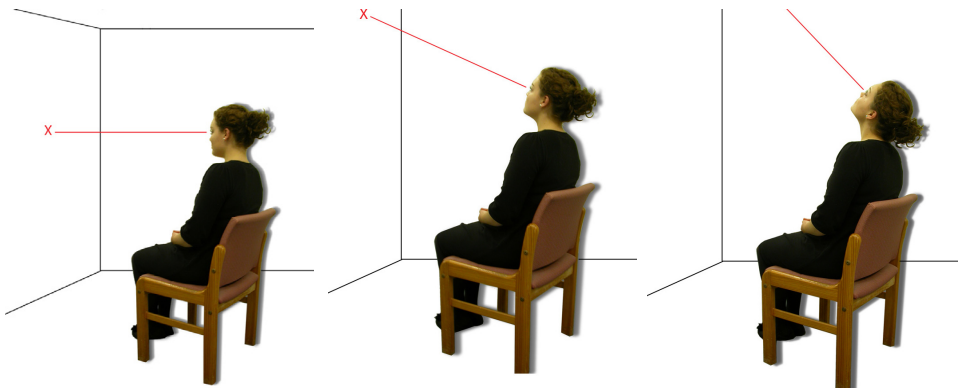
- Lie on the floor with a folded towel under your head. Slowly nod your head as if saying yes as far as possible before the outer muscles of your neck harden. Hold 5 secs and slowly uncurl. Do not lift your head off the floor throughout the exercise.



- Stand against the wall with only the back of your head supporting your body weight when you are on the phone/watching TV



- If comfortable to do so, follow a line up the wall onto the ceiling and back again. Gradually go further onto the ceiling and then follow the line back to where you started. You need to be able to control this movement without pain letting your head move on your neck. Then you can hold for 5 seconds at each increment to improve your muscle endurance.



Headache's associated with neck dysfunction

<i>Cervicogenic Headache</i>	<i>Tension Headache</i>	<i>Migraine</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Associated with neck movement/awkward neck position - Neck pain can precede headache - Upper neck stiffness - Fluctuating continuous pain - +/- associated pain @ base of skull, neck or neck/shoulder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bilateral (both sides) - Lasts hours to days - Pressure feeling, not pulsing pain - Not increased by exercise - Mild to moderate intensity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Usually unilateral (one sided) - Moderate to severe pulsing pain +/- vomiting & nausea exacerbated by bright light & noise Aggravated by exercise
<i>Action Required</i>		
<p>Physiotherapy is most beneficial for these symptoms</p>	<p>Physiotherapy may be helpful to release tension in the body</p>	<p>Physiotherapy least beneficial</p> <p>See your Doctor for further test to determine the triggers</p> <p>May be due to chemical changes that activate pain pathways to the brain</p>

Disclaimer: If any of these exercises increase your discomfort, stop & consult your physiotherapist.

Eastern Sports & Spinal Care

141 Kensington Rd NORWOOD SA 5067

Ph: 8331 0606 **Fax:** 8331 0832 **Web:** www.sportsspinal.com.au