

Using Physical Therapy to Treat Headaches

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All of us experience headaches caused by stress or fatigue at some point, but when they become recurring and interfere with your daily life, it could signal the need for a more intensive approach. Physical therapy can provide relief and a long term solution for chronic headache sufferers.

Some patients who come into the clinic for headaches report that this is the only symptom they're experiencing. However, most patients have noticed additional issues in conjunction with their headaches, such as neck or shoulder pain. Headaches are often connected to other injuries that can be treated together.

As with any other injury, your first appointment will involve an evaluation or an assessment with the physical therapist to determine what type of headache you are suffering from (tension headaches, migraines, or headaches resulting from another muscle pain or joint injury) and then they will design an individualized treatment plan for you. Therapists can identify the roots of your headaches and find any connections, like spasms of the face muscles, poor posture, or tightness between the shoulder blades.

Treating headaches with physical therapy can provide benefits beyond just getting rid of aching or throbbing in one's head. It can also improve joint mobility and strengthen muscles in the upper back and neck, which will effectively lessen the likelihood of chronic headaches returning. A headache often makes any other discomfort feel even worse, so treating headaches can have a chain reaction and give you a clear mind to address other aches and pains.



When headaches are frequent and ongoing, they can interfere with our jobs, relationships, sleep, and quality of life. If you experience recurrent headaches and have tried other remedies with no success, physical therapy might be a good option for you.

Could Poor Posture Be Causing Those Migraine Attacks?

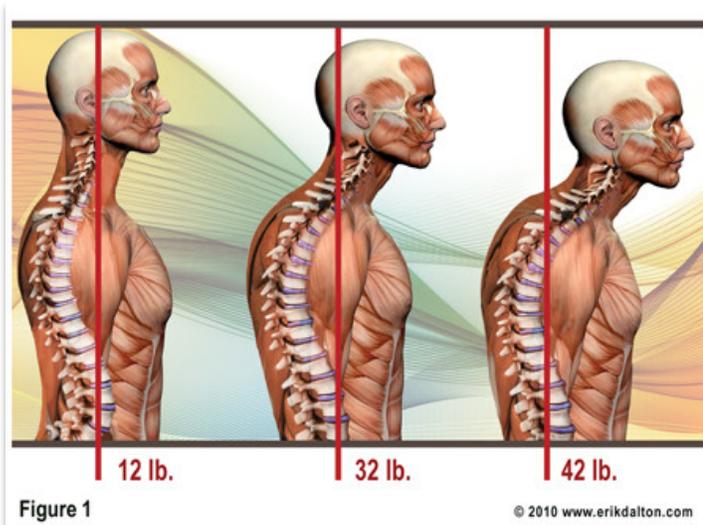


Figure 1
“For every inch of forward head posture, it can increase the weight of your head on the spine an additional 10 pounds”. –Erik Dalton, Ph.D

“Sit up straight” “Don’t slouch” These are common phrases we have heard from early childhood right through to our adult lives, but there is a lot of wisdom to be found here.

If you are experiencing migraines or frequent headaches, poor posture could be the cause. Our modern lives are largely to blame for this. Hunching over computers, sitting in cars for hours and sprawling on the couch can all lead to back and neck pain which ultimately leads to a migraine.

Types of headaches caused by poor posture

Poor posture can often be the cause of neck-related and tension headaches. These are the headaches that attack

the scalp or the neck due to muscle tension. Neck related headaches are usually caused by inflammation to the facet joints in the upper and middle parts of your neck. This in turn can cause tension that triggers a migraine.

Are you sitting comfortably?

Lets start with how you spend your day. Do you spend a lot of time sitting at a desk or are you more active during a typical day?

If you are seated at a desk, is your chair comfortable? It is designed to support your back and reduce tension in your neck? Neck tension is one of the early triggers for migraines and can be painful enough in itself.

If you spend a lot of time on your feet, do you have the tendency to slouch when you walk? Are you standing for long periods of time without a rest, or standing in one place?

We are also slaves to 24 hour syndrome, a good example is shopping for groceries when we should be asleep, just because the store is open. All in all, it’s the perfect recipe for continuous and chronic headaches.

Other factors that could be causing your poor posture and associated headaches include:

- Stress
- Poor muscle tone
- High heeled shoes
- Pregnancy
- Work stations that are incorrectly set up
- Carrying heavy backpacks
- Countertops that are too low or too high
- Holding a small child or baby

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Kathleen's Favorite



Posture

I like to be conscious of my posture, especially while I am work. It is important that you keep a tall posture by setting your shoulders. To set your shoulders you should think about an upside down U. You want to sit/stand tall. Raise your shoulders up, slide them straight back, and roll them down so your shoulders are set directly over you ribcage. I have a timer set on my watch to go off 10 minutes to every hour, this reminds me to sit or stand tall and set my shoulders.