

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Katie Gravesen, DC

The Chiropractic Approach to Ending Migraine Pain

The pain of a migraine headache can be excruciating: making accomplishing even the simplest of tasks daunting. The good news is that chiropractors, like Dr. Gravesen, offer all-natural solutions to this often-debilitating condition.



Medication Dangers

Dr. Gravesen is concerned about the increased prevalence of migraines and the growing number of sufferers who turn to prescription and non-prescription drugs to mitigate their pain: unaware of the potentially dangerous side effects.

Medication for migraines also has a marginal track record, according to numerous researchers. As one major study concluded, “Predictably reliable treatment for most headache types is often lacking.” (*Headache* 2006;46:212-20.)

Not only that, medication may actually *worsen* headaches over the long-term, transforming an acute disorder into a chronic one.

According to German researchers, medication-overuse headache (MOH) accounts for approximately 50 percent of all chronic headaches. The only known strategy to reduce the prevalence of MOH? Prevent its development “by restriction of anti-headache drugs and constant education of pa-

tients.” (*Curr Pain Headache Rep* 2005;9:430-5.)

Basic Symptoms

Dr. Gravesen explains to patients that most migraines begin as a dull ache that develops into a constant, throbbing and pulsating pain felt at the temples, beneath one eye, and the front or back of one side of the head.

Migraines may also be accompanied by nausea, vomiting and sensitivity to light and noise.

Common Types of Migraine

The two most common forms of migraine are migraine with aura and migraine without aura.

When a migraine headache is preceded by visual changes — such as wavy or jagged lines, dots or flashing lights — the phenomena is known as an “aura.” Researchers estimate that approximately one-third of migraine sufferers experience an aura prior to headache pain.

Other types of auras include tunnel vision or blind spots in one or both eyes. The National Headache Foundation notes that “Aura can include vision or hearing hallucinations and disruptions in smell (such as strange odors), taste or touch. It can become even more disconcerting or frightening if it involves feelings of numbness, a ‘pins-and-needles’ sensation or even



difficulty in recalling words or speaking the correct word. These neurological events may last sixty minutes and will fade as the headache begins.”

The Chiropractic Approach

When spinal bones (vertebrae) become misaligned, it sparks a condition known as *vertebral subluxation*.

Dr. Gravesen corrects vertebral subluxation with safe, gentle maneuvers known as *chiropractic adjustments*.

Carpal tunnel syndrome, earache and low-back pain are among the numerous conditions tied to vertebral subluxation. This common condition is also linked with neck pain and migraine headache.

Research Shows Chiropractic Quells Migraine

Scientific studies show that chiropractic may prevent migraine headaches.

For instance, in one analysis involving 127 volunteers suffering from regularly occurring migraine headaches, 83 underwent chiropractic care over a two-month period. The remaining volunteers did not.

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At the end of two months, those who received chiropractic care “showed statistically significant improvement in migraine frequency, duration, disability and medication use when compared with the control group.” (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2000;23:91.)

A similar analysis of 218 migraine sufferers was equally impressive. After eight weeks of either chiropractic care, the common migraine drug amitriptyline, or a combination of the two treatments, the chiropractic-only group had 40 percent fewer migraines. Researchers concluded that “there was no advantage to combining amitriptyline and spinal manipulation for the treatment of migraine headache.”

What’s more, researchers noted that — unlike drugs — there were no side effects linked to chiropractic. “It [chiropractic care] should be considered a treatment option for patients with frequent migraine headaches.” (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 1998;21:511-19.)

Chiropractic care is equally beneficial when migraines are sparked by injury. Take the case of a 23-year-old male patient who fell on his head from a height of ten feet. Following the accident, he began experiencing bipolar-disorder symptoms, sleep disturbances, seizures, neck pain and back pain. The patient also began enduring migraine headaches.

A chiropractic evaluation revealed a vertebral subluxation in the patient’s upper neck (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2004;27:E5).

After one month of chiropractic care, the patient reported an absence of seizures and manic episodes, along with improved sleep patterns. After four months of care, seizures and manic episodes remained absent and migraine headaches were reduced from three per week to two per month.

And, following seven months of care, the patient reported the *complete* absence of *all* symptoms.

Prevent Migraine

The chiropractic approach to ending migraines focuses on prevention. Along with spinal manipulation to ward off vertebral subluxations, the following strategies are often suggested:

Reduce Stress

According to researchers, “stress has repeatedly been shown to trigger acute migraine attacks.” (*Psychother Psychosom Med Psychol* 2003;53:432-9.)

Manage stress by incorporating relaxation-inducing techniques into your daily routine, such as aerobic exercise, T’ai Chi, yoga, biofeedback, meditation, prayer or breathing exercises.

Engage in Aerobic Exercise

According to researchers in Switzerland, cardiovascular-friendly exercise may keep migraines at bay (*Curr Sports Med Rep* 2006;5:29-33).

Results were clearly impressive when 40 migraine sufferers without aura exercised on a treadmill for six weeks. In every case, exercise had beneficial effects on *all* migraine symptoms. What’s more, it increased endorphin levels — the “feel good” hormone known to block pain (*Cephalalgia* 2003;23:972-6).

Consider Dietary Supplements

Numerous studies show that vitamins and minerals may also help stave off migraine headache.

B-complex vitamins in particular may be beneficial. For instance, in one analysis, 400 mg per day of riboflavin (vitamin B²) slashed the incidence of migraine headache among participants by a whopping 50 percent. “The effect of riboflavin on migraine began at one month but was maximal at three months.” Migraine attacks, when they did occur, were also shorter in duration (*J Fam Pract* 2006;55:62).

The same publication also showed that magnesium reduced the frequency of migraine headache by 41.6 percent. Relief began after nine to 12 weeks of 600 mg per day.

Although controversial due to possible side-effects, research indicates that the herbs fever few and butterbur prevent migraines.

Note: Always check with your doctor of chiropractic before beginning any dietary supplement regime.

Get Plenty of Sleep

The relationship between headache and sleep is well documented. That’s why doctors of chiropractic urge patients get plenty of Zzzzzs every night!

In a study of 1,283 migraine sufferers, sleep complaints were common and associated with headache. “Migraines were triggered by sleep disturbance in 50 percent of patients,” with 71 percent reporting headaches severe enough to wake them from a sound sleep (*Headache* 2005;45:904-10).

Beware of Food Triggers

A number of dietary factors can spark migraine headaches, including:

- Alcohol and caffeine withdrawal
- Skipping meals
- Dehydration
- Sulfites in red wine
- Monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- Aspartame (NutraSweet®)
- Processed meat products
- Yeast-containing bakery products
- Meat tenderizers

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