

Understanding Headaches

A GP's Guide



There are many types and causes of headaches. These range from cervical (or cervicogenic) headaches, tension headaches to vascular / migraine type headaches. Cervical headaches are the most common type of headaches, and when treated using the right type of physiotherapy techniques and methods, can be very effectively resolved.

A Deeper Dive: What Are Cervical Headaches?

Abnormal hypomobility of the lower cervical and thoracic facet joints combined with postural abnormalities increase the load placed on the upper cervical spine. This leads to irritation of the bone, disc, nerve and/or soft tissue elements which are all pain-sensitive structures and cause cervical headache.

The upper 3 joints in the cervical spine can refer pain into the base of the skull, the face, head and/or temporal region. Jaw and jaw joint pain, sinus pain, visual disturbances, dizziness, nausea, tinnitus (ringing in the ears) and even an unsteady gait can also be indicators of cervical headache. Unlike migraines or vascular type headaches, cervical headaches are secondary headaches, meaning they result from an underlying neck problem.

Cervical Headaches v Vascular (Migraine type) Headaches

Physiotherapy does not directly affect the vascular component of these types of headaches but can definitely reduce the associated muscle and joint tightness, encouraging relaxation and pain relief. Migraines are known for having different triggering mechanisms and altered neck biomechanics are definitely seen in this population. This means physiotherapy is often worth considering in these instances.

How can cervical headaches present in your patients?



Neck Pain:

Discomfort or stiffness in the neck is a primary symptom. There is often localised cervical tenderness. The pain might radiate from the base of the skull towards the forehead or behind the eyes.



Head Pain:

The pain usually presents unilaterally and might be described as a dull, aching sensation.



Limited Range of Motion:

Individuals typically experience restricted ROM in the neck due to cervical facet joint hypomobility. Rotation is the movement most likely affected.



Shoulder and Arm Discomfort:

In some cases, pain can extend to the shoulders or arms, accompanied by tingling or numbness as the headache is closely related to poor posture and thoracic spine pathology.



Physiotherapy is a proven treatment method in the fight against Cervical Headaches

Physiotherapy plays a crucial role in managing and treating cervical headaches by addressing the underlying musculoskeletal issues contributing to the condition.



Manual Therapy:

We employ a variety of advanced hands-on techniques to restore facet joint mobility and reduce pain in the cervical spine.



Exercise Prescription:

Tailored exercises focusing on neck strengthening, posture correction, and range of motion improvements can alleviate symptoms and prevent recurrence.



Postural Education:

Educating patients on proper ergonomics and posture adjustments in daily activities minimises the strain on the neck.



Causative factors:

Underlying contributing factors such as poor posture, incorrect work habits, weak deep muscle (stabilising) function, muscle tightness and overactivity must be addressed successfully, to ensure the strain on all cervical structures is reduced to achieve a successful outcome.

What You Need to Know

Cervical headaches can be effectively treated by physiotherapy. Don't let your patient's quality of life be impacted by headaches or rely on constant medication. Physiotherapy, through its multifaceted approach, focusing on manual therapy, exercise, posture correction, and education, can alleviate the symptoms of headache.



Patient Outcomes

At **Benchmark Physiotherapy**, our treatment philosophy is to Remove, Restore and Redefine. Our experienced physiotherapists are highly knowledgeable in the specific demands of sport and expertly trained in injury management. We will work with your patients to develop an individualised rehabilitation program that will ensure their safe return to sport and minimise the likelihood of further injury.

Contact us to find out more about how we can help your patients reach their potential.

Call **1300 381 207**

References

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