



Cervicogenic Headaches

Are you someone that suffers with headaches, but you also get some or all of these symptoms along with it?

- Neck pain and stiffness
- Usually unilateral and does not change sides
- Begins in neck and spreads to your head
- Episodic 2-3 days/wk
- May last hours to days
- Varying intensity – can be moderate to severe

If so, you may have Cervicogenic Headaches. So, what does that mean? According to the International Headache Society having the above symptoms that are made worse with neck movement, sustained awkward head positioning or external pressure on your upper neck can mean that your headaches could be coming from a problem in your neck. The good news is that ***Physical Therapy can help!***

Comprehensive Evaluation:

Physical Therapy for Cervicogenic headaches starts with a comprehensive evaluation. A comprehensive health history is taken and then we check a number of other body systems (Nervous, Cardiovascular-Pulmonary as well as others) to rule whether or not something more serious is causing your headaches. Once that is complete, you would go through a comprehensive Physical Examination which could include assessment of:

- Active and Passive ROM Testing of the Cervical Spine, Shoulders, and if necessary lumbar active range of motion
- Muscle testing of the neck, shoulders and upper body
- Assessment of dermatomes, myotomes, and deep tendon reflexes
- Alignment and mobility of cervical spine, thoracic spine and the shoulder complex
- Upper body and trunk flexibility
- Additional special testing to help rule out and confirm the proper diagnosis for treatment.

Physical Therapy Treatment for Cervicogenic Headaches: (may include any of the following)

- **Manual Therapy Interventions**
 - Specific joint mobilizations for the Cervical and Thoracic spine to help promote mobility and help reduce local muscle spasms
 - Passive and active stretches and mobility drills
 - Soft tissue mobilization techniques can be used if necessary, such as Instrument Assisted Soft Tissue Mobilization or patient-applied techniques with foam roller or tennis ball
- **Therapeutic Exercise for Stabilization of Cervicothoracic Region**
 - Strengthen cervico-thoracic muscles in “every direction” with a comprehensive neck and upper extremity strengthening program, with an emphasis on parascapular and deep neck flexor strengthening and neuromuscular re-education
- **Cryotherapy**
 - Ice to cervical spine in order to achieve the analgesic effect in general, slow down nerve conduction velocity to reduce muscle spasm, reduce localized edema, reduce of joint “achiness” or “soreness” that can possibly occur from manual therapy and therapeutic exercise
- **Patient Education**
 - Patients will be taught about quality movement patterns with conscious and deliberate cervico-thoracic muscle engagement during dynamic activities for ADL's/IADL's/ work duties
 - Direction will be given about static posture set up (i.e. desk set up)
 - The importance of rest breaks for reducing cumulative muscle fatigue and/or performing HEP to reduce symptoms will be reinforced.
 - Education about current thoughts related to the science of pain science to help prevent fear avoidance behaviors.

Using a modern, evidenced based approach to the evaluation and treatment of Cervicogenic Headaches can be very successful in helping patients to be symptom free and to have a good understanding of how to manage symptoms should they arise in the future.

References:

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