Delivering Long Term Relief from Chronic Headaches

Every year, 17% of women and 14% of men present themselves to a healthcare practitioner looking for relief from headaches.1 Practitioners seeking to offer maximum, long-term relief to their patients can include headache treatment at Enfield Health & Wellness Center as part of their management strategy. Enfield Health & Wellness offers headache assessment and management that provides expert care for orthopedic factors contributing to many recurring headache and migraine situations. Once you have ruled out secondary headaches caused by underlying, organic diseases such as vascular disorders, infection, metabolic disorders or substance abuse, the remaining cases often present with a biomechanical component. Various reports have demonstrated that biomechanical lesions of the cervical spine and/or shoulder can result in referred pain subjectively experienced in anterior or posterior cranial muscles.2-4 In addition, doctors have connected myofascial conditions of the head, neck, and shoulders such as trigger points, hypertonicity, and spasm with stress headaches, cluster headaches, and migraines.5-8 Under chronic stress and/or poor posture, muscles can become adaptively shortened or lengthened and predispose patients for recurring headaches. Studies have repeatedly demonstrated that physical therapy effectively manages certain types of headaches.9-12 The positive results of physical therapy usually last long after therapy and/or medication have been discontinued.13,14

Indications for a Referral:

- Headache pain not responsive to medical management
- Trigger points in the cervical, cranial, or shoulder muscles
- Spasm or hypertonicity in muscles of the head, neck or shoulders
- Reduced ROM in the cervical spine, shoulder, or TMJ
- Complaints of myofascial pain associated with headaches. (In some cases, the myofascial discomfort is secondary to a migraine. Even in these cases, PT can help because the myofascial dysfunction can cyclically worsen the migraine.)
- Poor posture (especially rounded shoulders, anterior head carriage, and slouch)
- Pain described as a tight band around the head
- A history of neck trauma such as whiplash
- Headaches brought on by movement
- Headaches worsened by movement
- Radicular arm pain

Assessment for Headaches:

- Posture evaluation
- ROM evaluation: spine, TMJ and shoulders
- Neurologic screen
- Manual examination: palpating muscles during passive movement can identify “snags & nags.” Manual examination can also identify hypermobility indicating over-stretched muscles, weakness, &/or damaged connective tissue.
- Palpation: static palpation can identify trigger points, spasm, and hypertonicity
- Other orthopedic tests: In cases of referred pain, Enfield Health & Wellness can use specialized orthopedic testing to isolate problematic joints down to the exact cord level. We are the only practice in the area with a McKenzie Certified practitioner.

Enfield Health & Wellness Treatment Can Include:

- Targeted progressive exercises (strengthening & stretching)
- Mobilization, manipulation, and traction (including Graston Technique from a certified practitioner)
- Posture training
- Ultrasound
- E-stim
- Breathing exercises for pain management
- Home exercise plan & Independent pain management plan
- Ergonomic teaching & work place strategies
- Equipment recommendations (i.e. cervical pillows & home traction devices)
References


