

Headache Relief!

By James Bone

Headaches are one of the most common problems affecting people.

I treat people with headache problems regularly, and I have suffered headaches and migraines myself, since I was very young.

Headaches can vary from a vague discomfort to possibly one of the worst pains one can imagine, being associated with migraine.

Headaches, especially migraines, can be very disabling, causing people to adjust their lives to accommodate their problem.

There are 3 main types of primary headache:

Tension Headache – this is the most common headache, associated with tension in neck, shoulders, and a tight band around the head. The pain is usually on both sides of the head. Pain is thought to be due to increased sensitivity of the nerve pathways which relay pain.

Migraine Headache – this is less common, and affects women more than men. It can be disabling and is usually associated with intense pain, sometimes throbbing, on one side only. Migraine could be considered a brain dysfunction, associated with altered brain chemicals and increased inflammation. It can include other symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light, dizziness, and visual disturbances. Migraines can last from hours to days.

Cluster Headaches – this is the least common headache, and affects men more than women. It can be pain associated with one eye, which waters, and also have nasal congestion. Headaches last a shorter time, but come in clusters of headaches for a period, then being headache free for a time.

Secondary factors – There are also many other causes of headache, caused by secondary factors. These secondary headaches are beyond the scope of this article, but may include head pain from: referral from your neck, sinus problems, jaw problems, dehydration eg too much alcohol, fever and infections, flu, and many other factors.

Headache CAUTION- When to SEE your doctor!!!!

If your headache feels different, is new ie you don't normally get headaches, very painful, doesn't get better, is associated with other symptoms like dizziness, visual disturbance, body weakness, body numbness, slurring speech, disorientation, nausea, high fever, very stiff neck, recent injury to your head or spine, or anything else that doesn't feel right. See your doctor if you are not sure what type of headache problem you have – it is better to know what type of headache problem you have, then you can do the right things to better manage your problem.

What are common causes of headache?

It is often difficult to single out one thing that causes headaches or migraines, but rather factors which can cause headaches and migraines may be additive – meaning put enough factors together and it tips you over the edge into a headache or migraine. Factors can include:

- Being Stressed, tired, depressed
- Holding tension in your muscles – failing to relax regularly
- Poor Posture can be associated with tension headache – check your work situation
- Strong odours, and intense light – can aggravate for migraine
- Weather – drops in barometric pressure preceding rain, or rises in temperature, beyond what was expected, can especially affect people with migraines
- Hair accessories which hold the hair in a tight pony tail, can stimulate scalp connective tissue and lead to headache
- Food Sensitivity – red wine, chocolate, nitrates – processed meats, tyramine – aged cheeses, aspartame, many other foods specific to the individual
- Sleep changes
- Blood sugar – missing meals
- Hormones – period cycle, the pill, other hormones
- Intense physical activity, including sex, can lead to lead to problems for people with migraine type headache
- Genetics

What can you do to ease headache pain?

- Medications (best to speak to your doctor or pharmacist about this) may include: paracetamol, ibuprofen , and special medications for migraines
- Cool Compresses to your forehead and neck – trying cooling your feet also
- Heat Packs – these are useful for tension headache to relax tight muscles
- Gentle Massage to neck, scalp - or pressing the temples
- Acupressure – pressing the pressure points on your fatty pad of your web, between the thumb and index finger, can give relief to some people.

Most importantly - what can you do to prevent headaches/migraines?

- Restore Balance to yourself and your lifestyle – reduce the factors, which may lead to headache or migraine.
- Manage your stress – including more relaxation
- Regarding posture – always remember to LIFT TALL. Get advice from your yoga teacher, physiotherapist, or other body worker, if needed
- Regular and enough sleep
- Regular Moderate Physical Exercise, such as brisk walking
- Regular meals – reduce food sensitivity foods

- Get advice from doctor/specialist, naturopath, Ayurvedic practitioner, Chinese doctor, etc about managing your hormone cycle better
- Take extra care of lifestyle balance in extreme weather

Notice the same old TIPS regularly come up – why? Because getting the basics right is the most important. Sometimes we focus too much on the complicated, and fail to get the simple basics right in our lives.

Can yoga help?

Yes – as yoga can provide an effective way to manage stress, aid relaxation and utilise yogic principles to bring balance to your life, including simplifying and attitudinal changes. It is best to have a yoga program specifically tailored to your needs, but you can always start with the breath.

Simple Breathing Practice

Place one pillow length ways then another pillow across the top (like a T-shape). Lie back over the pillows, with your bottom on a bed or the floor, your middle back on the length ways pillow, and your head resting on the cross ways pillow. Feel how the pillows open up your chest and breathing. Close your eyes (if comfortable) and begin to breathe slow and deep – feeling the belly rise and fall to your breath – 5 or more counts in and 5 or more counts out. Relax and breathe for 3 to 10 minutes. Enjoy!

Call James or Radhika for information about a personal yoga practice 3398 3258.

References & Resources

- www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/headache.html - Medline Plus site all about headaches and also access to migraine information
- www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/headache.html - another general information site for headaches and migraines
- www.mayoclinic.com/print/migraines/HE00004/METHOD=print - Mayo Clinic Site on managing Migraines
- www.familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/common/brain/disorders/127_printerview.html - another site on managing migraines
- www.achenet.org/education/ControversiesinHeadacheMedicineMigrainePreventionDiets.asp - interesting article on controversy of food sensitivity and migraine
- www.jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/295/19/2320 - general information about headaches16