



## PERSONAL MESSAGE

## Understanding and treating Headaches

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**P**ain anywhere in the body is a signal that something is wrong, or at least non-optimal. Headaches are no exception. There are many “triggers” that may cause a headache. It is very important to find out what the “trigger” is and get it addressed as soon as possible.

Physical Therapy can help certain types of headaches, specifically those that originate from the joints, muscles and nerves of the neck and upper back. Dysfunction or mechanical restrictions in the joints of the neck and back can cause irritation in the associated structures, and pain is perceived as a headache. The headache may be felt in one or several areas of the head and neck. With most pain, muscles in the area respond to this irritation by tightening up as a protective mechanism. This causes more pain and loss of motion in the area. The muscles in the head and neck are especially susceptible to tension. A Physical Therapist can help to relieve the joint dysfunction and tension thus breaking the pain-spasm cycle, which may relieve the headache.

There are multiple possible causes of headaches originating from the neck or back. To name a couple, possible causes are trauma and postural problems. If the headache is due to poor or sustained postures, or irritating movements of the neck, there is much that can and should be done by a Physical Therapist. First, it needs to be determined if work postures or other activities are contributing to the headache in any way. Physical Therapists are experts on what positions and postures have the least amount of stress on various parts of the body. They can look at the way your job site or home is set up and can make recommendations, if necessary, to reduce or change harmful sustained work postures or repetitive motions that may be contributing to the headache.



Heather Reeves —co-owner, Avante Physical Therapy

In addressing someone’s headache, the therapist needs to release the dysfunction and tightness in the joints, and release the spasm, trigger points and tightness in the muscles. This is done using manual techniques, including joint mobilizations, soft tissue mobilizations and massage, stretches and some modalities including heat, ice, ultrasound and others. Sometimes cervical traction is used to gently stretch the neck muscles and relieve any pressure in the joints of the spine of the neck; this can also be with manual techniques.

The therapist should always assess the posture of the neck, shoulders and upper back. An exercise program is developed to change any harmful positions or motions that may cause pinching of the nerves in the neck.

Problems with the jaw joint (temporomandibular joint, or TMJ) are often the culprits in causing headaches and so should never be ignored. Physical Therapy is very effective in getting rid of pain resulting from jaw dysfunction.

In summary, areas to be checked are: posture of the neck and back, posture of the foot (flat feet can affect the head and neck), maintaining positions that are harmful and can compress the joints and nerves, dysfunction of the jaw joint and motions that can cause compression in the neck or abnormal movement patterns.

Regardless of the cause of headaches, neck joints, muscles, as well as movement, are always affected and should be treated by a physical therapist.

# RISK FACTORS that cause HEADACHES and what to do about them

by Gaynor Hale,  
Physical Therapist

“Although headaches can be incapacitating, most of them are not associated with serious illness. But because they can be so debilitating you should get them treated appropriately as soon as possible. Physical therapy is very effective in eliminating this problem.”

**H**eadaches affect about 12% of the population. Not all headaches are of the same intensity—they can range from mild twinges to being so severe the person is unable to function. Headaches are frequently an indication that something else is wrong, so they should not be ignored.

Even though the types and causes of headaches can differ widely, there are some common threads that prevail throughout that make some treatment approaches effective in reducing them, if not eliminating them, which can greatly help a person to have some control over them.

## TYPES OF HEADACHES:

### Tension Headaches:

These are the most common ones. They generally affect both sides of the head, neck and shoulders. The pain is dull and persistent and can vary in intensity. There can be a feeling of pressure, heaviness and a feeling like a tight band around the head. They can last anywhere from thirty minutes once a week, to all day every day and even sometimes waking a person at night.

**Causes:** Emotional or physical fatigue, prolonged reading, dehydration, sitting for long periods with bad posture and environmental stress such as loud noises or toxins in the air.

**Sinus Headaches:** These can give a gnawing pain over or under the eyes with blocked sinuses caused by colds, flu or allergies. This type of headache can increase as the day goes on or if the sufferer bends

his head forward.

**Causes:** They can occur when the sinuses are swollen and their openings into the nasal passages are obstructed, stopping the normal drainage and causing pressure to build up.

**Migraine Headaches:** These are vascular and can affect people of any age, though it is more common in the 25 to 34 age group and

in women more than men. The symptoms can be a moderate to severe throbbing pain, usually on one side of the head and can be accompanied by nausea.

**Causes:** Diets that contain wine, cheese, chocolate, nuts, soy sauce, citrus fruits, alcohol, caffeine and food additives, such as MSG or sodium nitrate, can trigger these.

### Temporal Arteritis Headaches:

These are common in people over 55 years old. They present with

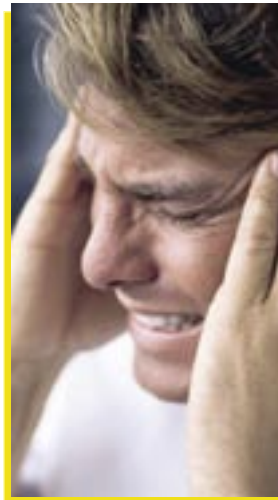
persistent pain anywhere in the head though more common over the temples. They can be severe with burning or throbbing, eyesight problems, mild fever, weight loss or jaw pain with chewing.

**Causes:** Inflammation of the arteries supplying blood to the head.

**Cluster Headaches:** These mostly affect men. They have severe pain around one eye, with congestion of that eye, and occur usually at night. They generally last between 15-90 minutes and up to days at a time.

**Causes:** Excessive smoking or alcohol.

**TMJ:** A very common source of headaches is TMJ syndrome. This can be caused by



# Tips and Tricks

## EASY EXERCISES TO RELAX YOUR NECK



1. Tuck your chin in and drop your head slowly forward. This will relax the muscles in the back of your neck.

2. While sitting in a straight chair, catch the fingers of your right hand under the chair seat to anchor them and to keep your shoulder down while tipping your head to the left. This will stretch and relax the muscles on the right side of your neck. Repeat on the other side.



3. Roll your shoulders in a circular motion.

4. Shrug your shoulders up toward your ears and then relax them all the way down.



5. Tip your head backward stretching the muscles in the front of your neck.

dental problems or tension in the jaw from physical stresses on the neck, such as reaching or working on computers for long hours, etc. It is more apt to occur when one is tired, hasn't eaten or has eyestrain.

Your head weighs about 15 pounds (the same as an average bowling ball) and is delicately balanced on top of the spinal column, held there by numerous muscles in your jaw, neck, shoulders and back. These muscles can go into spasms from the kinds of stresses mentioned above or if they get weak, tired or overworked. When they spasm, they can cause headaches.

### TREATMENTS

**Triggers:** Avoid things that trigger your headaches such as wine, cheese, chocolate, nuts, soy sauce, citrus fruits, alcohol, caffeine and food additives. Avoid bad posture, dehydration, becoming overtired, etc.

**Sleep:** Make sure you get adequate sleep. This keeps the muscles in your neck and jaw from getting fatigued.

**Exercise:** Get regular exercise and keep yourself physically fit. This helps your muscles to not spasm, keeps them from getting overworked and overtired. Stretching exercises for the neck and jaw as well as the shoulders and back can have a great affect on reducing headaches. Exercises to strengthen weak muscles can also be very advantageous. You may need a physical therapist to isolate the correct muscles to stretch and which ones to strengthen so you don't make the situation worse.

**Eating healthy:** A healthy diet is vital in keeping your neck and jaw muscles functioning properly all day long.

**Stress:** Good stress management can keep the tension from building up in your muscles. Take frequent breaks from stressful tasks or situations. Various techniques for relaxation can help to reduce blood pressure and stress hormones. Some physical therapists are trained in these relaxation techniques.

**Dental:** Dental intervention such as correcting unstable bites or using night splints when necessary can be done by a dentist. Physical therapists can assist this process with very specific stretching and strengthening techniques designed to restore the TMJ to its normal function and therefore reduce the pain and headaches associated with it.

**Postural exercises:** The posture of the head and neck plays a critical role in reducing headaches. Because the muscles in this area are so numerous and their relationships so intricate, it will take the skill of a physical therapist to identify the correct approach and to which muscles so that you can eliminate your headaches.

Although headaches can be incapacitating, most of them are not associated with serious illness. However, because they can be so debilitating you should get them treated appropriately as soon as possible. Physical therapy is very effective in eliminating this problem. So why suffer when you don't have to? See your physical therapist today!

# FAQ

**I get a clicking in my jaw and a headache starts right after that. What is causing that?**

The clicking is from a movement of the disk in the jaw joint. When this is irritated it can cause the surrounding muscles to tighten which will cause the headache.

**I get a headache after working on my computer for about an hour. What should I do?**

This could be from eyestrain or from bad posture while sitting at the computer. Get your eyes checked. Make sure the monitor is at the correct height and distance from your eyes. If you find yourself leaning forward, it is too far away. If you find yourself trying to lean backward, it is too close. Get up frequently to stretch and move about.

**I get headaches sometimes after I eat. Can food cause headaches?**

Yes, the foods most known to cause headaches

are wine, cheese, nuts, soy sauce, citrus fruits, alcohol, caffeine and food additives such as MSG or sodium nitrate.

**I have a lot of sinus headaches. Can't I just get some medication to take care of them?**

Medications, such as over-the-counter analgesics or anti-depressants are sometimes prescribed. However, these only mask the real problem. Virtually any sinus medication can and has been known to cause headaches. So medication is not always the answer. It is much better to find out what is triggering them and handle that.

**My headaches sometimes go away after I drink some water. Why is that?**

Dehydration is a common cause of headaches. Drinking a lot of water only once or twice a day doesn't work because the body can only absorb a certain amount at one time. So the best thing to do is drink water frequently throughout the day.

## Do you need to see a Physical Therapist for your headaches? Take this simple test...

YES	NO	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you get headaches while working at your computer.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you have a clicking noise in your jaw associated with your headaches?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you get headaches with certain activities?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do certain movements of your head/neck cause headaches?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you get headaches after working with your arms overhead?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you get pain in your shoulders or arms associated with your headaches?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you get headaches at work?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does your neck get tired before getting a headache?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you waking up with headaches in the night?

**Results:**

If you have answered yes to any of these you should be checked out by your physician and/or physical therapist.



# Featured Physical Therapist

## Hannah Parry, BS



**H**annah received her physical therapy degree from King's College of London, England in 1998. Hannah is one of the Physical Therapists on staff in the Cary office and currently provides 1:1 Pilates training at Avante Physical Therapy.

"Pilates is a unique approach to exercise which can improve postural alignment and body awareness, develop core strength, and create a balance between strength and stability."

Hannah received her MAT 1 Pilates Certification at the Pilates Certification Center in Richmond, VA. Hannah's interest in Pilates stemmed from volunteering as a model for patients during Pilates courses offered at Queen Mary's Hospital in Sidcup, England in 2000. Hannah was impressed by the overall success of the program with at least 80% of the patients showing significant reduction in their symptoms. Hannah has experience in training clients and patients of all skill levels from beginner to advanced. She is able to adapt Pilates principles to meet your specific rehabilitation or fitness goals.

# SUCCESSSES

## What patients are saying . . .

My rehab program & treatment has been wonderful. My therapist pushed me to do my best and kept me informed about my condition at all times. Fabulous care all around.  
—KW

Avante Physical Therapy gave me exactly what I needed; a caring staff, personal attention, an excellent program and the BEST physical therapist! If I ever need PT again I will definitely return to Avante.  
—DM

The folks at Avante are great – Hannah has really helped me with pain management.  
—TK

I have had multiple visits to Avante Physical Therapy and found my

course of treatments to be very effective! I am very satisfied with the professionalism of the staff. I enjoy the one on one sessions and the visits

are always fun. These people are becoming like family. Thank You!  
—JH

Geert Audiens is knowledgeable and communicates well. He inspires

confidence based on clear evidence of expertise in his field. I have and will continue to recommend Geert and all of the Avante staff to my friends who may need physical therapy.  
—TM

I was extremely satisfied with the service and treatment that I received while going through physical therapy at Avante.  
—FL

Very professional services, I enjoyed working with Hannah she is always courteous

and helpful in getting to the key pain areas. Thanks for wonderful service!!  
—DS





# HEADACHE

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## I Pledge Allegiance ...

On January 5, 2006 Heather Reeves, one of the owners and a Physical Therapist of Avante Physical Therapy, obtained her US Citizenship. Heather is originally from South Africa and moved to the United States in 1998.

Heather and her partner, Geert, opened Avante Physical Therapy's Cary office 5 years ago, followed by our Apex office 3 years ago. Heather, you are truly an inspiration to everyone you meet and we wish you a heart felt congratulations!



—Avante Physical Therapy Staff and Patient's

**we care about you**

**Call us today at**

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**for a free consultation**

**INSIDE:  
Understanding  
and treating Headaches**

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