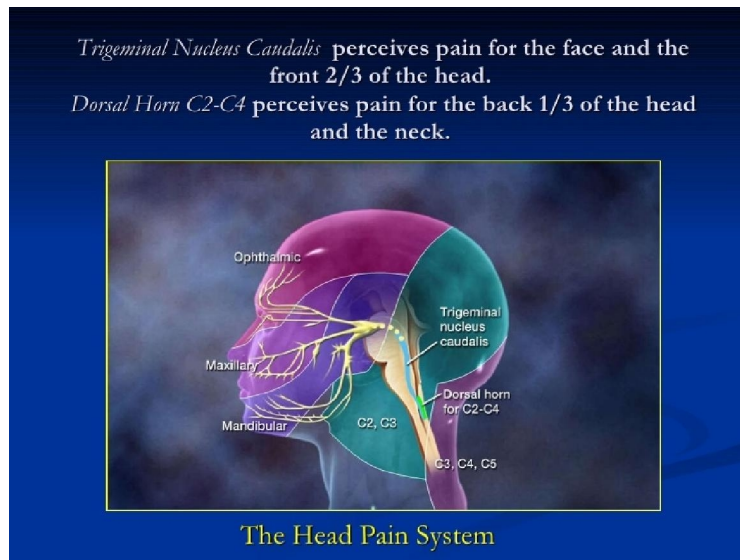


By Dr. Derek Conte



Headaches, jaw pain, tooth pain, sinus, ear and balance problems are very common complaints. Their origins can often be traced to misalignments of the spine or even the cranial bones themselves. Many times, a simple spinal adjustment can clear things up completely. To understand why this is possible we have to understand the anatomy and the nerves involved.

The Trigeminal Nerve is the 5th cranial nerve emanating from the Pons area of the brainstem. As the name implies it has three main parts: the Ophthalmic, Maxillary and Mandibular divisions which exit just in front of each ear. The Trigeminal nerve controls the muscles of mastication (chewing): Masseter (2), Temporalis (2), and the medial and lateral Pterygoids (4). Tightness or slackness of these muscles can cause TMJ dysfunction and pain. The Trigeminal nerve also provides sensation to the entire face, from the top of the head to the bottom of the chin, and from the nose laterally to the ears, including the eyes, eyelids, sinuses, lips, teeth, gums and tongue (Not taste though, only touch!).

The Second and Third Cervical nerves (C-2 & C-3, also called the Greater and Lesser Occipital and Auricular nerves) arise from the upper cervical spine, between C-1/C-2 and C-2/C-3 respectively. They exit to the rear just below the skull, providing sensation to the back of the head and ears, taking up where the Trigeminal nerve left off.

But how can all these important nerves coming from different areas and the many complaints associated with them be addressed with a spinal adjustment? I asked myself that same question 25 years ago in anatomy lab... my favorite subject. When in doubt, always go back to the anatomy. Anatomy is truth.

I had great professors of anatomy in school. Our brilliant neuroscientist prof showed me it was because the Trigeminal nerve shared a nucleus in the spinal cord with the C-2 & C-3 spinal nerves. I never saw it in a text book but learned that the Trigeminal Nucleus Caudalis reached down from the brainstem into the sensory Dorsal Horn of the upper cervical spine and it all made sense (The image above illustrates this clearly). This kind of knowledge seems esoteric but it is critical to a chiropractor's work and effectiveness. Chiropractor's do much more than move bones around!

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