

What is a Headache?

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By Dr. Derek Conte

There is a knife-like stab of pain behind the eye slicing into the brow and temple, sawing your head in half. The python exits the base of the skull, sliding up the back of the head and winding around the sides with a cruelly crushing force. Nauseous and seeing double, your ears ring and pop, making you feel hard of hearing. Your balance is off too. You'd like to drill a hole in your head if that would relieve the pressure in your sinuses. The eyes and nose running like faucets and all you want is relief, so you grab the prescription pills or the tylenol and head to the darkest place you know to sleep it off. When you wake, you feel better, but tomorrow is another day and the chance of another headache.

Headaches are treacherous and can be triggered by many things: chemicals, perfume, alcohol, processed foods or food allergies, hunger, dehydration, blood pressure changes, hypertension, disease, infection and more. But the most common cause of headaches is the compression of a nerve exiting the rear of the head below the base of the skull. This is the *second cervical* or *Greater Occipital nerve*, which arises between the first and second cervical vertebrae and gives sensation to the entire rear half of the head. Now, sensation to the face, including the forehead, eyes, temples, cheeks, nose, lips, teeth, tongue and jaw, is covered by another nerve that comes out of the brainstem. This is the *fifth cranial* or *Trigeminal nerve*. What is very interesting is that these two very important nerves are actually connected in the spinal cord so spinal misalignments causing compression of one nerve can cause a pain reflex or muscle spasm through the other, thus the possibility of pain anywhere in the head. Therefore, if we correct that misalignment with a chiropractic adjustment, we *remove the cause* of the headache. This can obviate the need for drugs.

Drugs may help temporarily but only address symptoms. A simple exam by a chiropractor can precisely identify the problem and show how to correct it. People are amazed at the effectiveness of chiropractic care and wonder why they waited so long to get adjusted. Headaches are *not* normal and it is certainly possible to be headache-free.

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