

Acupuncture for Headaches and Head Pain

What are headaches? What types of headaches are there?

Simply defined, a headache is a pain in the head due to some cause. Headaches may result from any number of factors, including tension; muscle contraction; vascular problems; withdrawal from certain medications; abscesses; or injury.

Headaches fall into three main categories: tension-type, migraine and cervicogenic. Tension-type headaches are the most frequent. Patients who endure tension-type headaches usually feel mild to moderate pain on both sides of the head. The pain is usually described as tight, stiff or constricting, as if something is being wrapped around your head and squeezed tightly.

While migraines affect far fewer people than tension-type headaches and have a much shorter duration, their symptoms are much more severe. They typically affect women more frequently than men, with pain that usually occurs on one side of the head. Migraines can be so severe that they can cause loss of appetite, blurred vision, nausea and even vomiting.

Cervicogenic headaches are the most recently diagnosed type of headache and are musculoskeletal in nature. They may be caused by pain in the neck or spine that is transferred to the head. Many times, cervicogenic headaches go undiagnosed because of their recent classification.

Who suffers from headaches?

Nearly everyone will suffer a headache at some point in time. They are one of the most common physical complaints that prompt people to treat themselves or seek professional assistance. Some estimates say that up to 50 million Americans suffer from severe, long-lasting, recurring headaches. While most headaches are not necessarily symptomatic of another condition, they can be very distracting and account for significant amounts of time lost from work.

What can acupuncture do for headaches?

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has a very consistent and philosophically-based framework for headache etiology, physiology, diagnosis and treatment strategy. Acupuncture, as an effective treatment modality, has been applied to headaches from the earliest beginnings of TCM.

Acupuncture is not only effective for migraine headaches, but also works very well with tension headaches, cluster headaches, post-traumatic headaches, and disease-related headaches that might be due to sinus problems, high blood pressure or sleeping disorders. The greatest advantage of acupuncture over Western medicine is that it does virtually no harm. Some medications can have serious side effects and can (in some instances) actually lead to patients experiencing a "rebound" headache. Unlike synthetic drugs, acupuncture has virtually no side effects, and the procedures for treating headaches are much less invasive with acupuncture than with surgery.

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