



Cervicogenic Headache

Cervicogenic headaches are mild to moderately severe, unilateral headaches which originate in the neck or suboccipital musculature and can evolve into temporal and forehead pain.¹ Several authors have hypothesized that dysfunction in the upper cervical segments (Occiput-C3) is a primary component in these headaches.^{2,3,4}

These headaches are usually insidious in onset secondary to postural faults, but may also be resultant of trauma. The main symptom of cervicogenic headaches are unilateral head and neck pain, however, they may cause a variety of symptoms in addition to pain. These symptoms include cervical trigger points, motion loss, blurred vision, sleep changes, and lower energy level.^{1,5}

Several authors have studied the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions for the treatment of cervicogenic headaches. There is evidence for the use of postural education, postural strengthening, mobilization/manipulation to the cervical and thoracic spine, and soft tissue mobilization.⁶⁻¹¹

Physical therapy intervention should be focused on regaining normal cervical mobility in the upper cervical spine, decreasing soft tissue dysfunction (triggers and tightness), and patient education on posture. Using the above interventions, various studies have shown a significant decrease in frequency,^{7,8,10,11} intensity,^{6,7,9,10,11} and duration^{9,11} of headache.

At Body One Physical Therapy we are dedicated to adhering to evidence-based practice. Our treatment of these patients includes the interventions listed here, and minimizes the use of therapeutic modalities for which there is little evidence. In order to continue the growth of evidence for our interventions, we currently perform outcome measures on all of our patients with cervical dysfunction using the Neck Disability Index. Feel free to contact us with any questions.

References

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