

Cervicogenic Headaches

Painful Headaches Originating in the Neck

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Condition Sheet



When a headache is caused by a problem in the neck or cervical spine area, it is known as a cervicogenic headache. This type of headache can be a debilitating medical condition, having a very negative effect on quality of life.

The treatment for this type of headache differs greatly from the treatment for migraine and tension-type headaches, making accurate diagnosis essential for achieving pain relief.

If you suspect your neck may be the source of your headaches, our network of pain management physicians has the expertise to diagnose your condition and offer proper treatment, returning you to an active lifestyle.

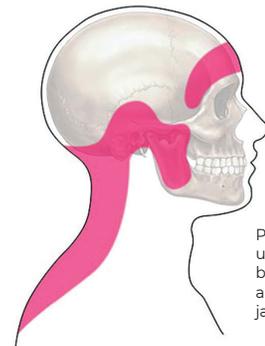
What is a cervicogenic headache?

More than 40 million Americans suffer from chronic, recurring headaches. Over 90 percent of headaches occur in the absence of trauma or underlying disease and are considered to be primary headaches, such as migraine and tension headaches. When headaches occur as a result of a medical issue or condition, they are classified as secondary headache disorders. Cervicogenic headaches are a type of secondary headache that arises due to problems with the bones, nerves or soft tissues of the neck (cervical region). These headaches can be caused by factors such as trauma to the head and neck or osteoarthritis of the cervical spine joints.

The need for an accurate diagnosis

The symptoms of a cervicogenic headache can mimic those of a migraine, making the diagnosis difficult. However, there are some subtle differences. The pain of cervicogenic headaches is typically on only one side of the head or face. The headaches are often triggered by neck movement, awkward head positions, pressure on certain parts of the neck and even a cough.

Your physician will take your complete medical history and perform a physical examination to aid in diagnosis. Imaging studies (MRI, CT scan, etc.) are sometimes useful in identifying correctable causes of this type of headache.



Possible areas of pain:
upper back and neck,
base of head, the ears,
above the ears, the
jaw, above the eyes

The importance of treatment

Anti-inflammatory medications and physical therapy are initial treatments for cervicogenic headaches. However, if these more conservative measures fail, our network of pain management centers offers additional non-surgical options to provide long-lasting pain relief.

Your physician may recommend injections of anti-inflammatory corticosteroid medicine that are directed into the joint space or near the nerves of the upper spine. Although the corticosteroid medication does not change the underlying problem, it can break the cycle of irritation and pain, allowing the body to begin healing. The injection is guided by fluoroscopy (live x-ray) to ensure accurate needle placement. Pain relief usually occurs within 48 hours.

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In addition to injections, a radiofrequency neurolysis procedure may be recommended to offer prolonged relief that you may not otherwise achieve. Radiofrequency uses heat created by a special generator to desensitize specific nerves and interfere with their ability to transmit pain signals. A radiofrequency procedure typically provides relief for 6 to 12 months, and for some up to two years and beyond.

Another option might be peripheral nerve stimulation, which uses a small implanted electrical device to interrupt pain signals to the brain. The device is usually permanent, although it can be easily removed.

If you suffer from headaches, our network of board certified pain specialists can accurately diagnose the source of that pain and offer a treatment plan that works.

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