

Is your headache really a neck ache?

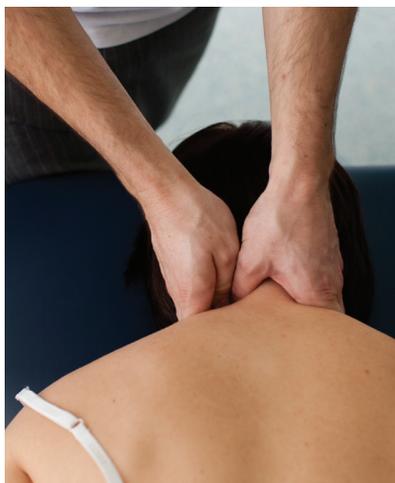
For many people, headaches start as pain or tension at the top of the neck. As the pain worsens, it may spread to the back of the head, the temples, forehead or behind the eyes. Moving the neck or bending forward for a long time tends to make it worse.

This happens because the nerves in the upper part of your neck are connected to the nerves in your head and face. A disorder of the upper neck or muscles can cause referred pain to your head.

Any of the following points could suggest that your neck may be causing the headache:

- Does the pain radiate from the back to the front of your head?
- Headache with dizziness or light-headedness
- Headache brought on or worsened by neck movement or staying in the same position for a long time
- Headache which always feels worse on the same side of your head
- Headache eased by pressure to the base of the skull
- Headache which persists after your doctor has checked for other causes.

How physiotherapy can help



Physiotherapists are experts in posture and human movement. They will be able to determine if your neck is causing or contributing to your headaches. Physiotherapists may use:

- Mobilisation
- Manipulation
- Functional and rehabilitative exercises
- Encouraging normal activity
- Postural assessment, correction and advice
- Relaxation therapy
- Laser, ultrasound, electrotherapy and heat treatment
- Massage

Your physiotherapist can also offer you self-help advice on ways to correct the cause of headaches, such as practical ergonomic tips for work and in the home; adjusting furniture, relaxation, sleeping positions, posture and exercise.

Treatment

Postural neck ache can usually easily be treated with some gentle mobilisation by a physiotherapist and a stretching program to prevent recurrence.

Headaches are often caused by disorders of the neck or physical and emotional tension. Physiotherapists can successfully treat headaches originating from the neck or soft tissues and show you how to prevent the pain from occurring.



You can prevent the onset of your headache by following this advice:

- Sit up properly and arrange your work station to best suit your height and shape.
- Stand up every 15-20 minutes to recover the arch in your spine, both at home and at work.
- Go for a long walk (40 minutes) per day, ideally in one go or split it in two, 20 minutes at lunch and 20 minutes when you finish work.
- Try to stretch regularly through the day.
- Don't drive for greater than one hour without getting out to stretch your legs.
- See your Physiotherapist if you have pain that doesn't settle down in 48 hours.