



When Your Head Hurts

Managing Headaches Ballarat

Just about everybody has had a headache at some time. Perhaps it was just a dull ache behind the eyes or around the temples or maybe it was a throbbing or stabbing pain. It may have gone away after a good night's sleep or maybe you woke with it. It may have been slightly unpleasant, or totally debilitating. If you're lucky it only happens occasionally. If you're not lucky it happens often.

In my practice as Chinese medicine practitioner, I seen many people with headaches and have heard all these problems. There is no doubt that headaches aren't fun and chronic or reoccurring headaches can be distressing.

What are some of the causes of headaches?

There are many causes of headaches – these are some of the most common.

Stress – Stress can have both physical and emotional effects leading to a headache. It is often cited as one of the most common causes of headaches. If you're under significant and long periods of stress, the headaches may become chronic and severe.

Muscle Tightness – Tightness in the neck and shoulders are common and may contribute to headaches. Common causes of muscle tightness include stress or exercise, including manual work, where you use your shoulders a lot.

Poor posture – Sitting or standing with you head dropped forward will place excessive strain on the neck muscles which may result in headaches. This is particularly common in people who use a computer a lot and sit in "vulture position": with their head drooped forward and shoulders hunched.

Lack of sleep – This is very common when people are busy, stressed or during the festive season. During these times, people may get less sleep than they need resulting in irritability and headaches.

Certain foods or drinks – Some foods or drinks may trigger headaches especially migraine headaches. These may include chocolate, food contain nitrites (such as preserved meats), coffee (or other caffeinated drinks) and red wine. (Of course, drinking excessive alcohol is well known to cause headaches!)

Skipping Meals – People who skip meals may suffer headaches and irritability due to a decrease in blood sugar.

Dehydration – Not drinking enough water is a common cause of headaches. People who work in hot environments, air conditioning or who do a lot of exercise or manual labour are particularly at risk of dehydration headaches.

Sinusitis – When the sinuses become congested they may cause severe headaches in the front of the face and around the eyes.

Illness – Headaches often occur with colds, flu or other illness. These headaches may be due to congested sinuses or part of the body's defence mechanism.

What can you do for headaches?

There are things that may help to manage both chronic and acute headaches.

Relaxation – Decreasing stress is important to managing headaches. Relaxation techniques such as breathing exercises, meditation, relaxing in a warm bath or quiet contemplation can all help manage and reduce the frequency and intensity of headaches.

Muscle relaxants – Releasing the muscles of the shoulders and neck can ease tension. Magnesium is one of the most common muscle relaxants and can be very useful if applied as a cream to the tight area. Other creams that may be helpful are heating ones such as Deep Heat or Tiger Balm.

Sleep – Often a good night's sleep can help to relieve a headache. Make sure the neck is supported either by a good pillow or roll up a towel and place inside the pillow case so it sits under the curve of the neck.

Stretching – If you have been sitting at your computer or reading for a more than half an hour, stand up at stretch your neck and shoulders. Then, reset your posture so your head isn't dropping forward.

Eat and drink something – Often headaches are caused by dehydration or low blood sugar. Keep a drink bottle handy so you can have a sip often and have regular meals. If you must skip breakfast or lunch, have a protein drink handy – it's not a meal replacement but it can help – and maybe some dried fruit and nuts.

Acupuncture – There is significant evidence that acupuncture is beneficial in treating headaches. There have been several research projects confirming that acupuncture is at least as beneficial as conventional preventive medication in reducing the frequency of migraine headaches. Acupuncture treatment of headaches has also been described as "safe, long lasting and cost effective". Other reviews of research have described acupuncture as having "potentially important role as part of a treatment plan for migraine, tension-type headache, and several different types of chronic headache disorders".

[Looking for help in managing your pain?](#)

At Phoenix Centre for Acupuncture and Holistic Health, I use a combination of acupuncture, Chinese medicine, cupping, diet, exercise, relaxation and life style advice to help you manage your headaches. Each session is tailored to your specific needs and what you are currently experiencing. Where necessary, I work with other health practitioners to ensure you get the best outcome possible.

Contact Phoenix Centre for Acupuncture and Holistic Health to find out more or to make an appointment (Telephone: 0487152507).

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