

## Understanding Tension Headaches A to Z:

In my San Diego chiropractic clinic we treat hundreds of people each year with headaches. Some of the more common types of headaches that we see are the: migraine headache, cluster headache, caffeine headache, vascular headache, spinal headache and tension headaches. Like its' label implies, muscle tension headaches occur secondary to hypertonic or overly tight muscles. This article will focus on the tension headache because it is the most common type of headache.

This article will describe in detail both how and why some people get tension headaches and what can be done for them.

Most people think of their skull as being covered only with skin. What many don't know is that underneath the skin lies a thin layer of muscle.

Another well known fact regarding headaches of this sort is that the pain that the patient feels is from these muscles, not from the brain.

Most of the time, in most people this layer of muscle that covers the skull maintains normal resting muscle tone. During these times, the patients are free from the effects of muscle tension and the resulting headaches.

Stress, whether from work, home or social situations can cause these muscles to tighten. Think of an irritated persons' furrowed brow. This reaction to stress can cause the muscles covering the skull to spasm resulting in muscle tension and a tension headache.

Typically, the headache will fade as the muscle spasm resolves.

Another common source of muscle tension headaches is the neck and upper back. There is a thin layer of muscle that connects the top vertebra in your neck to the base of your skull. This muscle group is known as the suboccipital muscles.

When we are stressed or injured (as in a whiplash accident), the neck muscles can tighten and spasm resulting in neck pain, back pain and muscle tension headaches as well.

There are many muscle groups and layers of muscle that overlap in the neck and upper back. Chronic tightness of these muscles can also trigger the onset of a chronic headache.

If indeed your headache is caused by muscle tension, it will certainly improve as the muscle tension decreases.

Headache relief can come from several different treatments.

A common home remedy for headache involves the use of ice packs. Ice packs can be applied to the head or neck in 20 minute sessions. Ice packs will remove inflammation built up in the muscles and calm the nerves.

Teaching yourself relaxation techniques can also be very effective if you carry the proper mindset. Sometimes there are minor misalignments in the neck called subluxations that can cause headaches.

Subluxations irritate the joints of the spine resulting in the muscles tightening around the joint as a protective mechanism.

Chiropractic adjustments help restore the normal healthy balance of the muscles that move and support the spine. A healthy spine is not bound by muscle tension.

A treatment program with an experienced chiropractor can result in dramatic improvements in patients suffering from chronic muscle tension headaches.