

# HEADACHES

There is effective treatment for almost every type of headache. The challenge lies in determining the type of headache, its cause, and in developing an appropriate treatment plan that will reduce both its frequency and intensity.

The International Headache Society describes several different categories of headache, but the three main categories most people deal with are:

- **Tension-type** (muscle dysfunction)
- **Cervicogenic** (joint dysfunction)
- **Migraine** (vascular--blood flow--dysfunction)

Physical therapists can help determine the type of headache you have and are experts in managing pain from **tension-type** and **cervicogenic** headaches. **Migraines** are typically more complicated, but often therapy can help lessen the severity and frequency of the symptoms.

## Tension-Type Headaches

Tension-type headaches (also called muscle-spasm headaches) are the most common types of headaches in adults. They typically involve an imbalance in which one (or a few) muscles become over-stressed. Underlying problems may be posture imbalance, repetitive movements/activities, muscle weakness, and poor/pre-existing habits.

A tension-type headache typically begins at the back of the head and, depending on the trigger point pattern, spreads to the top of the head and the eyes. You might feel an increase in facial pain along the cheeks near the jaw bone. People often describe a tightness, a sensation of someone tugging on their hair, or a feeling of wearing a tight cap. These headaches can worsen with specific positions--such as sitting at a desk--and may ease with rest.



## Cervicogenic Headaches

Cervicogenic headaches involve a problem with the joints in the neck. Often, these type of headaches occur after experiencing whiplash during an incident such as motor vehicle accident or similar traumatic injury. A cervicogenic headache feels similar to a tension-type headache; however, those with cervicogenic headaches experience decreased range of motion, often affecting one side more than the other. Nerve pain is also common and will often cause referred pain through the arm.

## Migraine Headaches

Vascular dysfunction is one of the most common causes of migraines. This can be due to too much or too little blood flow to the brain, causing the throbbing/pulsing characteristics of a migraine, which is often accompanied by photophobia (extreme sensitivity to light), phonophobia (extreme sensitivity to sound), nausea or vomiting. While, migraines are more complicated than other types of headaches, physical therapy can often help to reduce the symptoms and frequency of the migraines, making them more manageable and giving those who suffer from migraines the opportunity to return to their daily life.

## How can a physical therapist help?

Your physical therapist will work with you to identify the type of headache, breakdown contributing factors and develop a plan to address impairments leading to the headaches by:

- Improving neck mobility
- Improving your muscular performance
- Improving your posture
- Reducing your muscle spasms and trigger points
- Educating you about headaches and pain treatments

**If you'd like to learn more about what part physical therapy can play in the treatment of your headaches, please join us for one of our headache workshops this month!**

