

UPPER CERVICAL TREATMENT PROVIDES FREEDOM FROM CHRONIC HEADACHES

By Erin Elster, D.C.

Many people aren't aware of the relationship between upper cervical (neck) trauma and headache onset. According to medical research, it has been difficult to pinpoint the exact reason(s) why certain people suffer chronic headache pain; however, research is pointing toward upper cervical trauma as an underlying cause for many types of head pain, especially migraine, cluster, and tension headaches.

The upper cervical area of the spine refers to the two vertebrae located at the top of the spine, directly underneath the head. These vertebrae are chiefly responsible for the rotation and flexibility of the head and neck and are extremely vulnerable to injury through physical trauma, such as blows to the head, whiplash, auto and sports accidents, and falls. If these upper cervical vertebrae become displaced, even slightly, chronic head pain can occur. Unless the neck injury is addressed, the symptoms persist.

Upper Cervical Chiropractic care involves correcting the position of these injured cervical vertebrae. Realigning these vertebrae may reduce or eliminate many types of headaches. Liz, age 28, did not have trouble with migraine headaches until she took up snowboarding. "I began having migraines during the last five years after head-first crashes while snowboarding," she said. "Within two weeks of Upper Cervical Care, my symptoms began to diminish. Within a month, I was able to stop taking my daily medication because the migraines stopped," says Liz.

The most common types of headaches for which people seek Upper Cervical Chiropractic treatment are migraine, cluster and tension headaches. Migraine headaches are characterized by intense pain on either one or both sides of the head and are often associated with extreme sensitivity to light, dizziness, and vomiting. Cluster headaches almost always occur on only one side of the head. Their onset is sudden and intense and can also involve a drooping eyelid, tearing, and stuffy nose. Tension headaches are sometimes called 'stress headaches' and typically consist of pain in the head, neck, and scalp, and muscle tightness in these areas.

Of course, not every headache falls into one of these categories. The type and degree of pain varies from person to person. However, if any headache occurs more often than on an occasional or sporadic basis, it is safe to assume that there may be an underlying cause. Continually treating chronic headaches with pain medication may temporarily ease the symptoms, but it won't cure the problem. Jami, age 23, tried all the medications available. "Since junior high I had suffered through daily headaches and had taken many strong drugs prescribed by a neurologist with no success," she said. "This spring, I found Upper Cervical Chiropractic and am happy to say that I am headache-free!"

Many headache types are successfully treated with Upper Cervical Chiropractic care. The number of treatments required varies by individual, and is determined by factors such as age, severity of the cervical injury, and also the type and frequency of headache. A first visit to an Upper Cervical Chiropractor usually involves a spinal exam and diagnostic tests, including infrared imaging and cervical x-rays, to determine whether a cervical injury is present and whether benefit from treatment can be achieved. From there, the practitioner will determine a plan for treatment. Many patients notice an improvement in symptoms after just a few treatments.

Dr. Erin Elster is an Upper Cervical Chiropractor who has successfully treated over 250 patients with chronic headaches. Her published headache research is available on her website: www.erinelster.com. For more information, please contact Dr. Elster in Kahului at (808) 866-6551 or erin@erinelster.com.