

Cervical Headaches

The problem

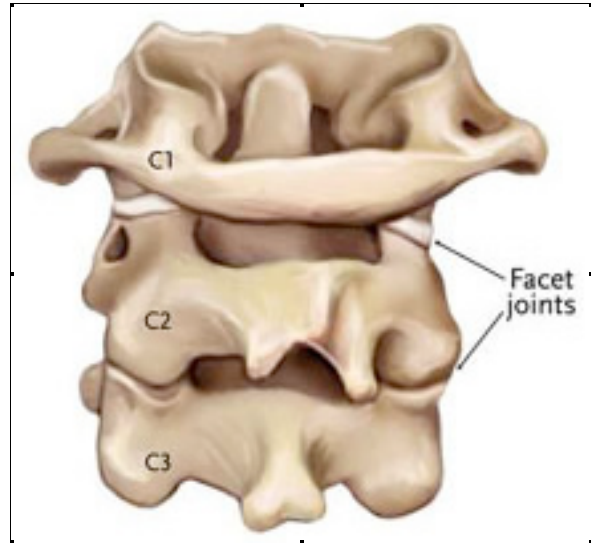
- Headaches generated from the top of the neck are common.
- These may be caused by painful trigger points in muscles or as a result of neural sensitisation resulting from poor upper cervical (neck) mechanics.
- Both of these mechanisms can then refer pain into the head and face.
- Poor sitting and standing posture is usually a large contributing factor.

Interesting facts

- There are over 300 different types of headaches described in the literature.
- Headaches tend to be grouped by the symptoms experienced by the sufferer rather than by the underlying cause.
- Recent evidence suggests a much larger involvement of the cervical spine in the development of a number of headache types, much more than previously thought.

What you can expect/look out for

- Different levels of the cervical spine refer to different areas of the head
- Upper levels tend to refer to the forehead and temple areas of the skull
- The middle levels cause pain at the base of the skull
- Tightness in the muscles at the base of the skull is commonly associated with headaches caused by the neck
- Intense migraine like headaches can also make people feel dizzy and in extreme cases even nauseous (consult GP to be safe)



Management options

- Physiotherapy to restore normal mechanics using stretching, massage, acupuncture, trigger point release and joint mobilization techniques has been shown to be very effective in treating these headaches.
- Heat, self massage and stretching to the top of the neck will usually help.
- Anti-inflammatory medication can be quite effective in settling symptoms (consult your GP).
- Maintaining good sitting and standing posture is very important.
- Pilates and exercises to strengthen postural muscles can be helpful in preventing re-occurrence of symptoms.

Things to look out for

You should notify your GP if you experience;

- Sudden onset of severe headaches.
- Headaches associated with nausea and vomiting.
- Headache associated with decreased level of alertness.
- Headache as a result of trauma.
- Headache associated with sudden unexplained weight loss.