

NEWS FROM FORT SANDERS REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER

Headaches – Not Anything to Ignore

More than 90 percent of adults get a headache every now and then. But for the 25 percent of women and 15 percent of men who get chronic or severe headaches, it can be a painful and frustrating condition.

Fortunately, headache patients don't have to suffer in silence, says Dr. Henry Hooker of Fort Sanders Neurology Associates and the Knoxville Headache Center. "It's important to know there is hope. Chronic headaches are a very pervasive problem, often undertreated and underdiagnosed, so patients need to know they are not alone."

While some headaches are caused by a specific physical problem like a pinched nerve or pulled muscle in the neck or shoulder, migraine headaches are often without a specific cause – and often misdiagnosed.

"Migraines are a chronic condition you have to think about like diabetes," says Hooker.

"They can be managed, if not necessarily cured."

However, according to Hooker, an accurate diagnosis is the first step.

"With each new headache patient we conduct a careful physical and patient history, with imaging (MRI or CT scan) of the brain," says Hooker.

If the headache is caused by another physical problem, like a misaligned vertebra or muscle spasm, treatment usually begins with physical therapy. Patients learn more about posture, exercise, and the alignment of their spine," Hooker says.

Headaches not associated with a physical malady require further investigation to determine their cause. "Migraines are often triggered by foods, stresses, and lifestyle habits that can be changed," Hooker says.

"Establish a good sleep routine, a good exercise routine, a good

diet. These three things are key to preventing migraines."

While medications can help alleviate headache pain, they can also offer their own set of problems long-term.

"One of the most common types of headaches I see is caused by overuse of medication," says Hooker. "You can actually make a headache worse with overuse of analgesics, anti-inflammatory drugs, and opiates. Your pain will not get better until you get off the pain pills."

Weaning off pain medication is difficult, says Hooker, and might require hospitalization. But in the end, patients can feel better and live healthier lives.

"It's important to know that treating headaches is completely different than treating other pain," says Hooker. "But with an accurate diagnosis and proper education, there is hope for headache pain."



All Headaches are NOT Created Equal

When someone complains of having a headache, many people can empathize. Headaches affect almost all Americans in varying levels of pain and duration. According to the National Institutes of Health, the most common headaches are:

- Tension-type headaches stemming from a physical problem like a pinched nerve or pulled muscle in your shoulders, neck, scalp or jaw. They might also be related to stress, anxiety or depression, a lack of sleep or food.
- Migraine headaches affect 28 million people in the United States. Most migraine sufferers are women, but men and children can get them too. Migraines are defined as a recurrent headache lasting between 4 and 72 hours, with pulsing, moderate to severe pain, nausea and sensitivity to light.
- Cluster headaches are typically seen in men, and characterized by severe, unilateral pain around the eyes or sides of the head, which last for 15 minutes to 180 minutes, and occur every other day, or up to eight times per day.

For those with chronic headache pain, doctors agree that determining possible headache "triggers" can help in preventing a full-blown headache. Keeping a headache diary to identify events or substances that seem to trigger your headaches (food, altitude, weather, lack of sleep, hunger, noise, etc) can be especially helpful. And, bad news for some: cheese, chocolate, wine, processed

meat, and caffeine, have all been linked to migraines!

If a headache does strike, try some of the following treatments to ease its duration and severity:

- Massage or heat applied to the back of the upper neck can be effective in relieving tension headaches.
- Try acetaminophen, aspirin (adults only), or ibuprofen for headaches. If over-the-counter remedies do not control your pain, talk to your doctor about possible prescription medications.
- Don't overuse medication. If you're using medication more than two days a week, you may be having headaches due to overuse. All types of pain pills, muscle relaxants, some decongestants, and caffeine can cause this pattern. Talk to your health care provider about overuse of medication.

Even those who suffer chronic headaches often worry if their headaches aren't signs of a more serious issue. So, when should you go to the Emergency Room with your headache? A visit to the Emergency Room is warranted if you experience:

- A sudden, "thunderclap" headache that is painful enough to stop your activities.
- A change in speech, vision, or movement of your arms or legs, loss of balance, confusion or memory loss.
- A headache gets progressively worse over a 24-hour period.
- A headache with fever, stiff neck, nausea and vomiting.

Physical Therapy Can Provide Relief for Headaches

Just before Christmas, Jobina Rimmer of Knoxville leaned over to kiss her two-year-old daughter, and felt a familiar sharp pain in her neck.

"I felt it pinch, and all of a sudden my neck wouldn't move," says Rimmer, 35, who has experienced headaches, neck, shoulder and arm pain for more than a decade. She immediately called physical therapist Stephen Karp at Fort Sanders Therapy Center, where she had been a patient before.

"I've had more than just headaches over the years," says Rimmer. "I had whiplash from two car accidents, and I fell on my arm and jammed my neck out of line in 2007. So, I knew I was going to need help. I called Stephen, and fortunately he worked me in within 48 hours."

Karp specializes in chronic neck pain and headaches and is manager of the center located on the Fort Sanders campus. He is well known in the medical community for being able to resolve some of the most difficult cases for patients in a short period of time.

Rimmer says Karp performed gentle joint movements in her neck, and he also used heat and deep tissue massage on the area to relieve the muscle spasm. Then he coached her on a series of exercises to strengthen her neck and shoulder muscles and talked with

her about sleeping positions and good posture.

The Fort Sanders Therapy Center treats all kinds of conditions, but people are often surprised how beneficial physical therapy can be for headaches as well.

"Last year I had quite a few headache patients," says Karp. "I'd say most of them had postural problems that were totally resolved with physical therapy." Karp works closely with neurolo-

gists to assure their treatments are complementary.

After just a week of treatment, Rimmer said she felt better already. "I can turn my head and look over my shoulder already. I didn't have any pain yesterday, and I'm feeling great."

For more information on headache relief and other types of physical therapy, please contact the Fort Sanders Therapy Centers at 673-FORT (3678).



"Fort Sanders Therapy Center Therapist Stephen Karp uses manual therapy to relieve a patient's headache."

CENTER OF EXCELLENCE: NEURO/SPINE



The Neuro/Spine Center of Excellence at Fort Sanders treats all neuromuscular disorders, chronic headaches, and pain management with the latest technologies and services available. Because everyone's pain is different and every treatment is unique. *That's Regional Excellence!*