Information for patients

NHS
Berkshire Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Cervicogenic Headaches

Advice and treatment

Cervicogenic headaches may be caused by pain from the joints and muscles in your neck. They often start on one side of your neck and move into your head.

This leaflet is intended to support the advice you've received from your GP and Physiotherapist.

The exercise diagrams have been created by Physiotools.

Visit Physiotools website physiotools.com

Signs and symptoms

Headaches are very common with 90% of the population experiencing at some point in their lives. About 15-20% of these are cervicogenic headaches. Most headaches aren't caused by a serious condition and can be treated with pain relief.

Symptoms may include:

- Commonly one-sided neck/head pain
- Headaches caused by moving your neck
- Feeling pain, pressure or stiffness at the top of your neck, or bottom of your head
- Having trouble moving your head or neck
- Pain on one side of your neck, shoulder or arm
- Restricted neck range of movement

You can find out more about headaches from the NHS website
Visit NHS website nhs.uk/conditions/headaches/

If you've had a recent head injury which is causing headaches, or you're having the following symptoms, please contact your GP:

- Feeling light-headed or dizzy
- Difficulty talking or swallowing
- Worsening headaches despite painkillers
- Sudden fainting, nausea or vomiting
- Numbness or tingly of your face
- Double vision or sudden change in your vision

Treating cervicogenic headaches

- **Practise good sleep patterns** – aiming for 8 hours sleep, and reduce screen-time before bed
- **Exercise regularly** – this can be in many forms from walking and gardening to running and weights
- **Consider an eye check –** to make sure this is not playing a part in the headaches
- **Managing stress and anxiety** – these may not cause your symptoms but they could contribute. Consider mindfulness apps such as headspace or calm
- **Heat –** using a heat patch or a wheat bag at intervals during the day, may also help. Please do not use heat if you have altered or poor sensation of your skin

Exercises

Complete these gentle exercises little and often to help reduce spinal stiffness and other symptoms. They may be uncomfortable, but they should not significantly increase your symptoms.

Sit up straight.

Slightly tuck your chin in. You can assist the movement direction by slightly pressing your chin backwards with your fingers (hand supported on your chest).

think about giving yourself a double chin, but keep your eyes level

Repeat 10 times 3 times a day

Sitting/Standing

Gentle rotate your head side to side, keep your shoulders relaxed.
do not continue if this makes you dizzy or light headed

Repeat 10 times 3 times a day

Sit

Place your hands behind your neck, elbows pointing forward and chest relaxed.

Move your elbows out to the side as your gently pull your chest forwards and sit tall.

Gently move between these two positions

Repeat 10 times 3 times a day

Thoracic Spine Rotation

On all fours, hands under your shoulders and knees under your hips. Spine in neutral position.

Reach one arm under the other armpit and then bring the arm back and reach towards the ceiling.

Note: Focus on the movement from your thoracic spine.

Repeat 5 times in each direction 3 times a day

How to contact us

Visit our webpage berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/physiotherapy

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