Can Chiropractic Adjustments Ease Migraines?

by BARBARA LEECH

Chiropractic for Migraines

If you suffer from chronic migraines, you are probably on the lookout for any treatment or remedy that you have yet to try. That level of pain, sensitivity to light and sound, and attacks being triggered by long days at work or stress can take over a large portion of your life.

Perhaps you have heard that some people receive some degree of relief by seeing a chiropractor, but have been uncertain if it could help you. I know how you feel. Do I risk the time, effort and money to try this? Can it really help?

Research shows that spinal manipulation offered by chiropractors may be an effective treatment option not only for those who get tension headaches, but for migraine sufferers who find that their pain often originates in the neck.

I sometimes find that when I can identify that a migraine is coming on, I am experiencing a feeling of pressure on one side of my head and a nerve-like pain within my neck on that same side. The pain appears up to a full day before the migraine fully develops.

I decided to research the subject to see if treatment targeted to some of my spine and neck issues could actually stop a migraine from being triggered.

What I found was a report released in 2001 by researchers at the Duke University Evidence-Based Practice Center in Durham, NC, which found that spinal manipulation resulted in almost immediate improvement for headaches that originate in the neck, including migraines.

It also found that patients had significantly fewer side effects and longer-lasting relief than if they took commonly prescribed pain or migraine medication.

So, it seems like this is a preventative treatment worthy of trying.

How Can a Chiropractor Help?

Your chiropractor is more than just someone you see for back pain or injury. He can do several things to help ease the tension and fix misalignment in your spine that is believed to trigger some migraines:

- In an effort to improve spinal function and alleviate the stress on your system, a chiropractor may perform spinal manipulation or several chiropractic adjustments to put your musculoskeletal system into proper alignment.
- You may be advised on how you can improve your body posture, improve something called your ergonomics (the posture you are in for extended periods of time each day- like while you work), or show

you exercises and relaxation techniques you can try on your own to ease tension in the neck and spine areas.
- A chiropractor usually looks at the whole body picture and that means what you are putting inside your body as well. You may receive nutritional advice and information on supplements, such as B-12, which is known to ease some people's migraine attacks.

What to Expect at Your Appointment

Your chiropractor will probably begin your appointment by discussing your medical history, including information on your migraines like when they began, how long they last and if you get them with or without aura. Try and be prepared with examples of what your triggers are, the frequency, quality, location, duration and severity of your migraines along with associated symptoms like visual disturbances, nausea, light and sound or intolerances to scents.

Next your chiropractor will conduct an evaluation of the musculoskeletal system. Your posture can play a big role in your spinal, joint and muscle health so how you naturally carry yourself will be examined. Particular attention will be paid to the muscles and joints of the neck. The neck muscles will be examined for tension or spasm. If you are found to have a reduced range of motion in the neck area, your treatment will probably be focused to that area.

Chiropractic treatment involves moving, stretching and manipulating the spine. The mission is to gently put back anything that has been moved out of its normal place. Chiropractors also use therapeutic massage, which may relax tense muscles. If you experience muscle spasms which lead to or worsen your migraine headaches, this type of deep tissue massage can reduce pain because it relaxes the affected areas.

Research Findings

Spinal manipulation is the primary treatment method if most chiropractors. There has been several research studies as to whether it can alleviate migraines and the findings are positive.

For example, a study reported on in the "Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics" in February of 2000, involving 127 participants showed that after two months of chiropractic treatment, 22 percent of the participants reported more than a 90 percent reduction of their migraines. These participants said they had significantly fewer migraines and a shorter duration of the ones they got.

Another study combined the results of 22 separate studies, which had more than 2,600 patients total. The overall results indicated that chiropractic treatment may serve as a good preventive treatment for migraines.

Are There Side Effects?

The side effects to a chiropractic treatment are typically pretty mild. You may feel relaxed or even a bit more tired. You may have increased tenderness or slight pain where the chiropractic manipulation occurred on the body or you might feel stiffness in the muscles following your first few treatments.

As with any treatment plan, talk to your doctor before you proceed. There are some people who this type of treatment may not be right for, (having osteoarthritis or being pregnant are special considerations in how treatment may be done) and only you and your doctor can ultimately decide if chiropractic treatment may help your migraines and if it is worth a try.