



# **Understanding Your Headaches:**

## **How To Help Your Doctor To Help You**

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# Headache 101

Headaches are commonplace in society today.

Millions of people have headaches.

And, there isn't just a single type of headache.

There are at least half a dozen types of headaches.

If you don't know what is causing your headaches, then the odds are poor for you to find the right treatment for your head pain.

Do you know what is causing your headaches?

According to the Centers for Disease Control, up to 80% or more of people that have chronic headaches have some type of Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) or jaw disorder.

In fact, sometimes jaw pain or headaches are often the only symptoms of this mysterious illness.

## **Do you have TMJ?**

Find out using the checklist provided below.

TMJ is a leading cause of head pain including migraines, headaches, earaches and neck problems.

If you do have TMJ, there is help for you.

- Do you feel your jaws are out of alignment?
- Have you been diagnosed with an overbite, which is a leading sign of a jaw problem?
- Did you have orthodontia as a child?
- Do you experience headaches frequently?
- Do you grind your teeth during the day or night?
- Do you have problems chewing?

- Do you find you sometimes bite your cheeks?

Some of these symptoms may suggest your jaw is not aligned properly, and this can cause head pain that is chronic and debilitating if not diagnosed properly.

Many people are treated for problems including an overbite when they are young; however, this does not mean you will not develop jaw problems including TMJ later in life.

In fact, it is very likely you will discover you have some form of jaw dysfunction as you age.

Be sure you visit your DENTIST as well as your medical or natural health doctor when trying to diagnose and treat your headaches.

Often, people have their wisdom teeth removed when they are young; this can cause your jaw to shrink, leading to jaw problems later in life.

What are the signs of TMJ?

They include frequent sinus infections, chronic migraines, neck and shoulder pain.

You may also find your dentist has a hard time numbing you up before a dental procedure.

If you find this is the case, be sure to ask your doctor whether you have or are at risk for TMJ, and what they can do about it.

It may be just the cure you are looking for.

# Head On for Headaches

When you visit your doctor you should talk with them about natural treatments for headaches, or treatments that do not require a prescription.

Many tension headaches for example, can be relieved with postural alignment, massage therapy and regular chiropractic or physical therapy care.

However, there are many over-the-counter treatments for headaches that are new and popping up everywhere.

One example is a rub on analgesic containing natural ingredients. "Head On" is a new and natural homeopathic formulation for headaches.

You simply check that your symptoms match those on the box (because there are a few different types of Head On, and then buy the package you want.

The product goes onto your forehead in much the same way you would apply Chapstick to your lips.

If Head On doesn't work, there are also many wraps, like cool headache wraps for migraine and tension headache sufferers.

These wraps instantly act like an ice packet when you apply them to your forehead.

They help relieve tension because they restrict the dilation of blood vessels in your head, which is often the cause for many headaches.

When investigating alternative or natural products like this, it is always in your best interests to contact your doctor first and ask whether these medications are safe or not.

Some of the questions you may want to ask your doctor are provided on the checklist below.

Make sure you use this checklist when visiting your doctor so you don't forget to ask any important questions you may have.

You can even add your own questions to the list.

- I have this product called "head on" is it safe for me to use?
- Do you know of any clinical studies supporting the treatment you plan to recommend for me?
- Is it safe to mix (name of supplement) supplement with prescription medications like Imitrex?
- What should I do if my headache doesn't go away?
- What do you think the causes of my headaches are?
- Is there any way I can prevent headaches?

If seeing a natural health provider, chances are they will go over your medical history in great detail before they make treatment recommendations.

If you find over-the-counter remedies are not strong enough to help you cope with your headaches, your doctor may recommend that you try something by prescription.

Just make sure you are fully informed of the side effects before you do this.

If you change medicines at any time it is also important that you let all of your doctors know so they don't prescribe medications that will interfere with your current routine, and don't prescribe medications you may be sensitive to.

# How To Describe Pain

Whenever you visit a pain specialist or a neurologist or even a family practitioner for headaches, they will ask you many different questions.

These questions will pertain to the frequency, duration and sensation of your headaches.

You will have to identify “how” your headaches feel, because doctors will sometimes be able to diagnose tension headaches with just a preliminary description of how they work.

Here are some questions to consider and questions you might ask, or those you might hear your doctor ask.

- Do you feel like your head is throbbing when you experience headaches?
- Is the pain dull or sharp?
- Do you feel like the pain radiates or spreads to other areas of your body like your neck or shoulders or back?
- What medications have you tried for your pain?
- Does your headache pain seem to come and go?
- Would you describe this pain as the “worst of your life”?
- How would you rank your pain on a scale of 1 to 10?
- Do you know of any triggers that may cause you to develop headaches?
- Have you been diagnosed with a specific type of headache pain in the last few years?
- How does your pain interfere with your daily life?
- Do you have a family history of head pain?
- Where is the pain that you feel?
- Do you see flashing lights or an aura with your headache?
- Are your headaches worse with movement?

- Do you notice any changes in your body, like your face becoming numb or limp, or do you experience numb or tingling fingers or toes with your headaches?

You can answer these questions ahead of time if you want to save a bit of time when you go to the doctor.

A doctor is most interested in understanding how and why your headaches attack.

With the information provided above, he or she will have a better chance at diagnosing the right type of headache so you can treat it accordingly.

Some of these questions may reveal whether you are at risk for a herniated disc, which is often the cause of headache for some especially when the cervical or upper spine is affected.

Your doctor may also want to find out whether you have different types of headaches at different times because the treatment you use for a stress headache for example, may not be the same as the treatment you use for a cluster or migraine headache.

If you suffer from head pain, you should seek care at your earliest convenience.

Without proper care and treatment, you could develop a worse problem than you already have.

# How To Evaluate Treatment

Once a doctor evaluates your pain they will recommend treatment.

Here is a checklist of symptoms and questions you should bring with you for your follow up appointment with your doctor.

- Is your head pain any better?
- How would you rate your daily pain now on a scale of 1 to 10?
- Do you have any side effects?
- Have you experienced a worsening of your symptoms including headache pain?
- Do you find your headaches are less frequent, more frequent or about the same?
- Are you happy with the treatment selected?

Some of the side effects you may have from prescription medications may include stomach ache, diarrhea, dizziness, sleepiness and for some people, the development of other types of headaches.

While it seems contradictory to prescribe something that would have side effects like this, many patients report they have relatively few side effects and do experience some relief from their pain with medication.

Your doctor may adjust your dose or medication depending on your follow up exam.

He or she will also evaluate your health medically to ensure you are not experiencing any severe complications associated with taking your head pain medication.

Make sure you carry these questions with you and write down your answers to them ahead of time when appropriate, so you have enough time when visiting your doctor to go over all of the questions you may have about treatment. With

great care and a little patience, you will find the root cause of your problems and find your headache pain soon resolves so you can continue to enjoy life!

For more information, visit [www.wellness.glebe-systems.com/headaches](http://www.wellness.glebe-systems.com/headaches)