

Headaches



Centre for Chiropractic & Sports Rehabilitation

An integrative, biomechanical approach to the everyday sports and spinal injuries.

Research indicates that there are two major types of headaches: vascular and mechanical. Vascular headaches are typical migraines, brought on by hormonal, chemical, or weather-related stimuli (such as changes in barometric pressure). Mechanical headaches can be just as painful as vascular migraines, but their source is different; mechanical headaches almost always result from tightness in the neck. Stiffness in the upper trapezius, suboccipital, and semispinalis muscles can all refer pain to the head, causing a headache. Additionally, damage to the cervical facet and the temporomandibular (jaw) joints can both refer to the head and cause a headache. In these cases, damage is most often caused by motor vehicle accidents and whiplash.

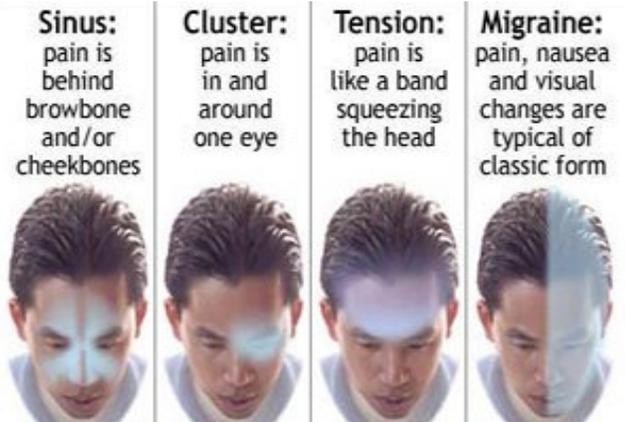


Figure 1: Common types of mechanical and chemical headaches

While some headaches are either strictly mechanical or strictly vascular, research has shown that most headaches lay on a spectrum between these two sources. An example typical of Southern Alberta is the "chinook headache": a headache brought on by chinook winds in the fall, winter, and springtime. While this headache seems to stem from fluctuating barometric pressure, it is worsened by preexisting tightness in the neck or jaw. So, while mechanical treatment cannot change the barometric pressure, most patients find that mechanical treatment at CCSR is effective for *all* of their headaches.

Assessment

At CCSR, we assess headaches for their mechanical component, and use manual therapy to treat headache-related pain. Even patients who experience chemically-related headaches will benefit greatly from manual therapy because it alleviates any trigger points and tightness that will inevitably worsen their headache symptoms.

Treatment at CCSR

Headache treatment at CCSR is specific to each patient, but will almost always include manual therapy, trigger point therapy, light friction massage, and low-level laser treatment. These research-based treatment styles are combined with education: as a patient at CCSR, you will learn proper posturing and good biomechanics (body-mechanics) that will allow you to alleviate mechanical tightness that causes headaches.

Home Treatment

Treating yourself at home is an integral part of healing; weekly treatment just isn't enough! During your sessions at CCSR, our practitioners will prescribe stretches, self-massage, and mobilization and strengthening exercises to complete at home. We encourage you to spend at least fifteen minutes a day completing these prescribed exercises! Following the doctor-prescribed home-treatment program will ensure that your treatment progresses and symptoms disappear; being treated once a week by our doctors will usually result in symptoms being managed - that is, they never get worse but they rarely get better!

We suggest that patients who suffer from chronic headaches to examine the stimulus that triggers their headaches. Many patients have relieved their headaches by reducing home and workplace stress, as well as reducing their exposure to common toxins (household and industrial cleaners, synthetic cosmetic and skincare products, food additives, MSG, and mould).