

What's Causing Your Headache or Migraine?

As a [headache](#) or [migraine](#) sufferer, you'll know how disruptive and inconvenient a severe headache or migraine attack can be. Not only does it impact on you, but also your immediate family and friends.

There are thought to be over 300 causes of headaches and migraine.

Luckily, most fall into three categories:

- [Neck Headaches](#)
- [Tension-Type Headaches](#)
- [Migraine](#)

Historically any headache that was of a "throbbing" nature was thought to involve the blood vessels within the head was thought to be a "migraine". Any headache that was "not throbbing" was labelled a "tension-type headache", despite there being no evidence. Research has demonstrated that cervicogenic headaches are at least as common as migraine and tension-type headaches of increased tension in the muscles of the scalp or forehead.

NECK HEADACHE

A secondary headache disorder is one where the headache can be shown to being caused by another problem, and that by fixing the other problem the headache can be alleviated.

Researchers feel that Neck Headache accounts for about 20-25% of all headaches seen clinically. It relates to a dysfunction of the upper neck, and is not predictable by X-ray or scan.

In simple terms, painful neck joints or muscles refer pain to your face or head. It can be quite misleading as the pain is typically felt in the same area as a migraine.

Neck headache sufferers will notice tenderness at the top of the neck and base of the skull. They may experience a loss of movement, although this is commonly not the case.

One of the main differences between Neck Headache and Migraine is that treatment of the neck is generally able to relieve the headache immediately.

Sometimes migraine sufferers can develop neck symptoms through the same mechanism, so it is important to seek advice and treatment from someone who is experienced in the assessment and management of neck headaches.

Accurate diagnosis is important to guide the correct treatment and management of headache disorders. Head pain can have many causes, not just neck headache or migraine. Correctly identifying the cause will lead to better treatment.

Common Characteristics of a Neck Headache?

The following symptoms are characteristics to neck headaches.

You may experience **any one** or several of these symptoms:

- Your headache seems to radiate from the back to the front of your head.
- Your headache be provoked by a neck movement, a sustained posture, stomach sleeping or with your head turned to one side.
- Your headache normally appears to be worse on one side of the head.
- Your headache appears to temporarily ease up when pressure or massage is applied to your neck or the base of your skull.

If you experience any of the above symptoms, please promptly inform your treating physiotherapist to assist your neck headache assessment and treatment.

How Can Physiotherapy Help You?

Physiotherapy can have very quick and effective results for relieving your neck headache.

The key to better treatment response is better diagnosis, and our trained physiotherapists are experts at determining the origin of your headache.

After you have been assessed your physio will start you on treatment that fixes YOUR problems.

Your treatment may include some of the following techniques:

- **Stiff neck joints** are successfully loosened via joint mobilisation (gentle gliding techniques), joint traction or in specific cases a gentle and localised joint manipulation (chiropractic adjustment) technique.
- **Hypermobile (or dynamically unstable) joints** require specific deep neck muscle strengthening exercises to stabilise and limit the movement available at the joint.
- **Tight or overactive muscles** may require stretching, massage, acupuncture, dry needling, or other relaxation techniques.
- **Weak muscles** will require specific strengthening exercises. This may include your postural shoulder blade and neck muscles.
- **Nerve dysfunction** will be addressed by your physiotherapist depending upon their specific findings.

- **Posture correction** via exercises, awareness techniques (eg postural taping), useful tips or a posture brace.
- **Helpful advice** on awkward neck positions and postures to avoid.

How Quickly Will Your Neck Headache Improve?

Relief of your headache symptoms can be very quick. If your headaches are solely caused by your neck it is common to experience **instant relief** as you walk out of the clinic.

Depending on what the underlying causes are, your pain and suffering can be fixed within days or weeks. In addition to relieving your headaches, it is the aim of your physiotherapist to address the reasons why you are experiencing neck headaches.