5 Simple Exercises to Beat Headaches



While there are many possible causes of headaches, an extremely common feature of many is poor mechanics and overload of the upper portion of the neck. Broadly these tend to present in 2 main categories, each with a slightly different approach taken in order to resolve the symptoms.

1. Stiff Necks

Overload to the upper neck often results from excessive muscular tightness or stiffness compressing the joints and can be a significant contributor in the development of headache symptoms. This stiffness is often related to poor postural habits such as slumped sitting with a forward head posture and/or weakness of the muscles of the neck and shoulder girdle. When this occurs over a protracted period of time, it may result in wear to the joints of the neck (osteoarthritis) and further stiffening.

In these cases, techniques to stretch and mobilise the neck often give immediate relief or reduction of headache symptoms. While stretching and mobilisation is an integral part of settling headaches in this population, without addressing the underlying postural drivers and potential weaknesses, overload to the neck continues and the symptoms can return.

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2. Floppy Necks

Hypermobility is essentially a condition where the ligaments and tissues surrounding the joints in the body are more stretchy than normal, resulting in a much more mobile joint.
While this may sound like a good thing, it often means that we have lost some of the passive protective restraint of the joint and need to rely much more on the surrounding muscles in order to prevent the joint from being pushed into positions where is does not tolerate load as well.

With these floppy necks, if the deeper stabilising system of muscles are not coping well, this can lead to overload of the neck as a result of excessive or poorly controlled movement.
Commonly overload in these hypermobile types will also occur as a result of the surrounding muscles working much harder than they should do to assist the stabilising muscles in supporting the neck.
This results in tired, stiff, sore muscles in the neck and shoulder girdle as well as restriction of the normal mechanics of the joints of the neck.

While stretching and releasing the tight sore tissue may provide some symptomatic relief, it is important that this is done in conjunction with some strength and stability exercises for the neck. Excessive stretch and release work can in fact de-stabilise the neck and make the symptoms worse.

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