Cervical Headaches

Headache is a common complaint with a variety of underlying causes and symptoms experienced. The role of the neck in the production of some headache symptoms is becoming much more clearly recognised. Broadly, the neck can produce headache symptoms in one of 2 ways. Pain can be referred directly to the head from painful joints and trigger points in the muscles or can result from a sensitised trigeminocervical nucleus in the brainstem.

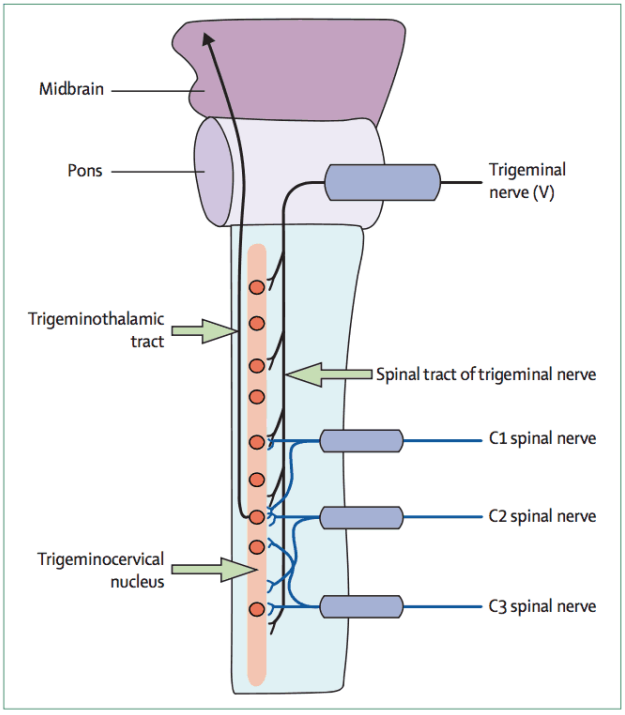


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Much of the information from the top of the neck, head and face is carried to the brain through part of the brain stem called the trigemino-cervical nucleus. When this pathway is receiving an increased flow of information from a mechanical issue in the top of the neck, it can become sensatised. In this state what would otherwise be normal input from the neck or face becomes magnified and can be perceived in the brain as a headache.

Commonly these mechanical problems in the neck which lead to headache are a result of poor posture, weak core or stabilising muscles of the neck and shoulder girdle, trauma or degenerative spinal changes. Some symptoms associated with headache caused from the neck include pain in the neck, head, face or eyes, dizziness, blurred vision and muffled or altered hearing.

E: admin@ibphysio.com.au | T: 02 9976 3540 | F: 02 9976 3290 | Suite 14, Level 2, 22 Darley Road, Manly, NSW 2095 Australia



Treatment

The first phase in treating cervical headaches involves restoring normal upper cervical mechanics. This is typically achieved through massage, stretching and joint mobilisation by your physiotherapist. Acupuncture can also be very effective in releasing tight, painful trigger points in the muscle. By restoring normal mechanics there is a decrease in the information being sent from the neck through the trigemino-cervical muscles and a resultant decrease in the hypersensitivity of the pathway. Under these circumstances there is a normalisation of signal processing in the brain and a decrease in headache symptoms.

The second phase of treatment involves removing or reducing the cause of overload to the neck. This often involves postural correction in conjunction with strength, stability and range of motion exercises for the neck to maintain normal spinal mechanics and reduce the risk of headaches in the future.

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Stop putting up with the pain and disability of chronic headaches. Book today for an assessment of your neck and a plan to get you pain and symptom free!

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