

Introduction

Because headaches are so common, some people think they are a normal part of life, but for the regular sufferer it can be very debilitating. Taking painkillers might give some relief from your headaches, but they do not always address the cause of the problem. The pain can be felt at the front, the back, behind the eyes, on just one side or all over the head. Other symptoms may be present in conjunction with the headache like nausea, dizziness, visual changes, jaw or neck pain and the list goes on.

There are many potential causes of headaches like illness, high blood pressure, dental problems, medication side effects, etc. However a vastly underestimated cause of headaches is structural problems in the neck and upper back. Mechanical stress from neck problems can affect the nerves of the face, head and neck and when spinal nerves and associated tissues are stretched or irritated they too can produce throbbing headaches.

Common cause of tension headaches

A common presentation with headache is an increase in the muscle tension at the base of the skull with pain felt locally and frequently it is also felt in the forehead and eye area. The tightened muscles and joint restrictions in the upper neck (from poor posture, stress, injury etc..) contribute to decreased mobility, irritation of local nerves and reduced blood flow.

How can osteopathy help you with headaches?

An Osteopath is a primary health care Practitioner who has the appropriate skills and knowledge to assess your complaint and decide the most effective course of treatment. Most osteopaths spend two thirds of their time helping people with neck and back problems and hence they are experts in identifying when a structural dysfunction may be the cause of headaches.

Osteopaths assess structural changes that may lead to immobility and dysfunction. They do a thorough physical examination that includes both observation and palpation, to form a diagnosis.

An Osteopath will work gently with your body using a variety of techniques to:

- Improve joint mobility.
- Decrease muscular tension.
- Reduce nerve irritation.
- Improve blood supply and drainage to and from the head and neck.
- Help prevent future headaches with advice on posture, exercises and stretching.
- Give advice on diet and fluid intake.
- Provide advice on improving ergonomics at both home and in the workplace.