



# Chronic Pain and Women's Health Newsletter

## PAIN 101 (Part 3) - Things That Make Pain Worse



*In the past two issues we have explored the pain response when it is normal and when it is abnormal. In the next two issues we'll cover things that make the pain experience worse or better.*

As if pain weren't bad enough, there are things that make us more sensitive to the discomfort it causes. *With help, some of these things you can control.*

**Stress** is one thing that plays a major factor in a person's experience of pain. In response to stress, the body "dials up" the brain's sensitivity and reaction to painful stimuli. Unfortunately, in addition to the daily aggravations we experience, pain itself is also a major stressor. All of this leads to a person feeling more discomfort.

**Poor posture** also has an effect on pain perception. Many people do not realize the detrimental effect that poor posture has on them. Breathing correctly becomes more difficult due to compression of the lungs. This leads to less oxygen in the body and decreased recycling of waste products. Your muscles also have to work much harder to maintain this unnatural position. This leads to microtrauma to the muscles and damage over time.

**Ergonomics**, or the design of the workplace to accommodate a person's postural

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Clemens Physical Therapy PLLC

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## HEADACHES/MIGRAINES

While headaches and migraines aren't likely to kill you, they can make you suffer. This problem is very common in both men and women and is found at all ages, including children. A lot of the time it may just be a nuisance. Other times, headaches and migraines

can be much more debilitating.

**Tension headaches** are one of the most common forms, occurring in 78% of adults and 15% of children. This type of pain occurs because of tightness in the muscles in the head and neck. Tension headaches may just

occur once in a while or may be chronic. Fortunately, this is also the type of headache that can respond best to treatments.

**Migraine headaches** are more than just a "very bad

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### Coming Soon!

- ☺ Effective Pain Treatments
- ☺ Tips and Tricks
- ☺ Fibromyalgia Info
- ☺ Your Questions Answered

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## Headaches cont...

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headache". They are caused more by chemical irritation. Frequently the person suffering has sensitivity to light and sound and may have nausea.

**Cluster headaches** are groups or "clusters" of headaches that may last weeks or months. They are sometimes seasonal in nature and often cause severe eye region pain. About 90 % of these sufferers are male. Fortunately this type of headache is the most rare

**Organically caused headaches** are a symptom of another disease or disorder. This type may be life-

threatening and causes include tumors, infection, and blood clots.

Signs of this type of headache include muscle weakness (especially one-sided), loss of consciousness or confusion, or pain that becomes



progressively more severe. These signs require immediate attention from your doctor.

For tension and migraine headaches there are several things that can help. These include medications, relaxation training, muscle relaxation, biofeedback, physical therapy, and acupuncture/acupressure. Seek the help you need to decrease your pain and get more out of life.

**Headaches can be helped!**

## Did you know? Fast Facts on Pain

\*\*The brain itself has no pain nerves and cannot "feel" pain. Headaches come from the muscles of the neck or irritation of the membrane surrounding the brain.

\*\*Cold, such as an ice pack, slows the pain signal to the brain, allowing you to hurt less.

\*\*Some foods such as caffeine, citrus, and processed meats may aggravate pain

\*\*Animals feel pain. Insects, fish, and worms react to pain stimulus but aren't believed to be able to "feel" pain. This is because they do not have the higher level brain function to emotionally process the feeling of pain and they do not suffer

\*\*Weight loss, even as little as 5 lbs, can help alleviate back pain and joint pain from arthritis.

\*\*Women may experience pain more severely than men. Scientists believe this may be in part because women have more pain receptors. They are also more prone to painful conditions such as fibromyalgia and pelvic pain.

## Research: Factors Related to Tension Headaches

In a series of articles, a group of researchers in Spain found links to factors involved in tension headaches. The results were published in 2006 and 2007 in *Headache*, and in 2007 in the *Journal of Orthopedic Sports Physical Therapy*.

They found that active trigger points in certain muscles were more common in tension headache sufferers. Trigger points are painful spots in the muscles that feel like knots. They also refer pain signals to other areas of the body.

In the case of tension headache sufferers, trigger points in the head and neck muscles caused headache pain. Some of the muscles include the sternocleidomastoid (the rope-like muscle on the side of your neck), the upper trapezius (on top of the shoulder), and the temporalis muscle (at the temple of the head). Those people with trigger points had a greater headache intensity and duration.

Other factors in tension headaches included decreased neck mobility, forward head posture, and weakness in the neck

muscles that bend the neck.

Common physical therapy treatment for headaches addresses all of these factors. Hands on treatment of trigger points, stretching of tight muscles, improvement in posture, and improvement in neck strength are all good ways to help headaches.

So if you want to decrease a tension headache, sit up straight and get rid of those knotty muscles.

## Pain 101 Cont...

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and functional needs is also very important. The design of desks, chairs, and other items in your workstation must be properly fitted to each individual. This is especially important for repetitive tasks or for work done in one position for long periods of time.

Improper breathing (fast, shallow, chest breathing) leads to less oxygen getting to your body's tissue for energy and healing. It also leads to a build up of toxins in the body that aren't being efficiently removed by proper lung expansion and exhalation.

Poor sleep also affects pain. The body normally repairs itself during certain sleep cycles. If sleep isn't of a long enough duration or isn't good quality sleep in these restorative phases, then the body cannot heal itself. This is bad enough if you are just trying to recover from



the daily "wear and tear" type of activities. If you already have an injury, this can lead to more pain and dysfunction. In certain conditions such as fibromyalgia, non-restorative sleep is common and leads to chronic pain.

*In the next issue: Pain 101 Part 4 -Ways to decrease pain.*

**Stress and poor sleep can worsen pain.**

## Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why do I hurt more during my menstrual cycle?

A: Oh those pesky hormones! Hormones vary during a woman's cycle causing a variety of effects. One of these is that females are more likely to feel pain the week before and during their period. It is also common to experience back pain as well as abdominal cramping due to the female organs "referring" pain to these areas.

While you may expect to have abdominal pain or back pain you may not realize that these hormones also affect your whole body. This means you may have increased pain in any area previously injured. Also be aware that your joints are more susceptible to ligament damage (such as ACL damage in the knee).

**Does  
Weather  
Affect  
Pain?**

Q: Does weather affect how much I hurt?

A: Research findings are varied on the subject. Cold, damp weather or precipitation such as rain or snow has not definitively been linked to the worsening of pain. However, changes in barometric pressure may be the culprit behind your increased aches.

The change causes expansion and contraction of muscles, tendons, and joints, which may lead to increased pain. Often changes in pressure accompany precipitation, but not always.

Based on personal and professional experience, I would have to agree with the barometric pressure theory. There are definitely increased "pain complaint" days that do not always coincide with rainy or snowy days. They do however commonly occur during large temperature swings.

So next time your joints ache or your back pains, you just might be able to blame mother nature.



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Helping People Who Hurt



## Chronic Pain and Women's Health Newsletter

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The content of this newsletter is provided for informational purposes only and is not intended to diagnose or suggest treatment for individuals. Please see your health care provider regarding your specific needs.

Fibromyalgia  
Chronic Pain  
Headaches  
Bladder Control  
Pelvic Pain  
TMJ (Jaw Pain)  
Osteoporosis  
Biofeedback  
Tai Chi, Pilates, Yoga  
Manual Therapy