

Your mother was right...sit up straight!

By Dr. Robert Mirandola

It is the middle of the night and you are awakened by the fire alarm sounding off... you smell smoke and discover your house is on fire! You have two options: Get yourself and your loved ones out and call the fire department or leap out of bed, run to the fire alarm, remove the batteries, and go back to sleep. What will you do? Most people, believe it or not, choose the second option. You see, if you are like 90% of the American workforce, you suffer from regular headaches, most common being tension headaches and migraines. Additionally, if you are like the majority of this 90%, you already have found an over-the-counter or prescription medication to temporarily take that headache away, fully accepting the fact that it will return once more, maybe tomorrow or maybe next week. But for now... whew!

You see, all headaches (the fire alarm sounding off) have an underlying cause. NOTHING in the body happens spontaneously. You can take medication to dull the nervous system (taking the batteries out of the fire alarm) or you can seek correction of the problem. Now, medication can be a necessity in certain circumstances, but to use it in a chronic way, as many do, can lead to further and more complex illness such as increased incidence of kidney failure, liver damage, or even, get this... headaches.

As a Doctor of Chiropractic I have been trained to look for the CAUSE of illness or symptoms and not just treat the symptom. I introduce patients to the reality that headaches are extremely common in our culture today, however they are never normal.

One of the most common causes of headaches (both tension and migraines) is a result of spinal misalignment that can put pressure on the delicate nervous system resulting in a screaming headache. This is how it works. When the spine is misaligned, especially in the neck, nerve pressure can affect both the tone of the muscles in your neck as well as the blood supply to your head. The effect of this can easily manifest as a headache. A thorough chiropractic exam is likely to show nerve irritation in many places along the entire spine that can be the underlying cause of many various types of headaches. So, how does this happen? This happens by the things you do on a daily basis: sleeping, exercising, slips, falls, car accidents, past injuries, or even sitting or standing with poor posture (by now you are probably slouching again).

Aside from correcting spinal misalignment, here a few more things you can do to help prevent these forms of headaches:

Tension Headaches

Hydrate yourself:

Most people in the American workforce are severely dehydrated - replacing the water cooler with the coffee machine. This has become a problem not only because they are not drinking enough clean water (spring water is best) to stay hydrated, but they are actually dehydrating themselves by drinking coffee, tea, soft drinks, or "energy" drinks instead. A great equation to use for water intake is your weight in pounds divided by two equals the number of ounces you should be consuming (increase with exercise or warm outdoor temperatures). Note that the above alternative beverages DO NOT count as water consumption.

Improve your posture:

As stated above, spinal misalignment is a very common cause of many tension headaches. Choose an accountability partner in the office. Every time they see you slouching, or you/they, have them call you out and correct yourself by sitting up tall, draw your chin and head back (not staring at the ceiling but as though you are trying to touch the ceiling with the top of your head), and bring your lower back forward. This will not correct spinal misalignment (seek a professional for this) but this will prevent added stress to compromised areas of your spine.

Deep breathing exercises:

To reduce the daily stress due to our work, family, finances, etc. deep breathing exercises should be done frequently. Begin by sitting back in your chair and sitting up tall. Roll your shoulders back and let them fall. Bring your chin back (as previously described). Take a deep breath through your nostrils, feel it down in your diaphragm, and exhale through your mouth. If you do not feel it in your diaphragm, allow your abdominal muscles to relax watching your abdomen rise and fall with each breath (this is very important). Do this for one minute and repeat as frequently as needed throughout the day.

Migraine Headaches

Drink distilled water and increase cardiovascular exercise:

These are very important to flush out large amounts of toxins from the body - another major cause of migraines.

Reduce red meats:

Red meat makes for an acidic internal environment which is known to promote the onset of migraines. To help alkalize the body's internal environment, tomato juice can be consumed.

Remove white sugar, white flour, alcohol, tea, coffee and cigarettes from the diet:

These have all been shown to trigger the onset of migraines.

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