

Two Self-Tests and 5 Signs Your Headache is Coming from your Neck. Plus, Possible Causes

In this video we discuss that specific type of headache that is caused by an issue with your neck (known as a “cervicogenic headache”). Cervicogenic headaches are different because they are caused by problems with the nerves, bones, or muscles in your neck. Although you may feel pain in your head, it does not start there. Instead, the pain you feel is referred pain from the neck.

We will describe the signs first. In addition to a throbbing head pain, symptoms of a cervicogenic headache may include:

1. A stiff neck along with the headache pain - your neck does not move normally.
2. Pain that spreads from the back of the head over the top of the head to above or behind the eye (one side or both sides - tends to be one side) (Ram’s Horn headache)



3. Increased head pain when you cough, sneeze, or take a deep breath.
4. A headache that begins or is worsened by certain neck postures or movements
5. Pain that is felt at the top of the neck and the base and back of your head on one or both sides.

Cervicogenic headaches can also cause symptoms like migraine headaches, such as light sensitivity, noise sensitivity, blurry vision, and an upset stomach.

Two Self-Tests:

1. In a standing or seated position, flex your head forward as far as it will go. Once in the position turn your head to the right as far as it will go. Make note of how far you turn. Have a friend watch or videotape. Then turn to the left as far as it will go. Keep the chin tucked down the entire time. A restriction on one side could be causing your headache.



2. Using your fingers press along the base of your skull where it attaches to your neck. Feel for tender spots. Especially note if pressing on the tender spot refers pain up into your head. You can also press along the backside and side of your neck seeking the same tender spots. A final spot to check is a muscle that attaches to the shoulder blade and the bones of the upper neck. The muscle starts on the top of the shoulder blade on the side nearest to your spine. Feel for tenderness as the muscle travels up and attaches to the upper neck. This single muscle can result in neck pain and headaches if the shoulder blade is in a poor position.



For treatment of “neck headaches” check out our YouTube video titled [Top 7 Exercises for Neck Pain and Headaches \(Neck Headaches\)](#).

What causes cervicogenic headaches?

Different circumstances can cause a cervicogenic headache including:

1. Degenerative conditions in the neck like osteoarthritis or a herniated disc.
2. A pinched nerve in the neck.
3. A whiplash injury.
4. An injury to the neck during sports or from a fall.
5. Poor neck posture while sitting or standing - especially forward head posture.
6. Poor posture of your shoulder blade or blades.
7. Falling asleep with your neck and head in an awkward position (head flexed forward, to the side, or to the back). This can happen if you fall asleep in a chair or sitting up in bed.
8. Sleeping with your head propped up too high on a pillow.
9. Sleeping on your stomach with your head turned to the side for a prolonged period.

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