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Berkshire Health Clinic, The Coachouse, 11 Castle Hill, Maidenhead, SL6 4AA

www.berksclinic.co.uk

About the author; Dr Laura Rigby

Laura graduated in 2008 from the McTimoney college of chiropractic and became the youngest graduate from that college at the time. In 2009 Laura started her own Chiropractic business offering mobile chiropractic care. From offering mobile care to opening her own clinic in a rented room, Laura now has two clinics in Berkshire in Wokingham and Maidenhead. Laura now mentors her team along with post graduate chiropractors entering the Royal College of Chiropractors. Laura also sits on the board for Sacro Occipital Technique Organisation Europe, which organises chiropractic technique seminars around Europe. Laura also helps at these seminars as a 'table instructor' teaching the techniques.

Laura has seen many different patients and presentations, injuries and conditions over the years. Most people choose to specialise in a particular field; paediatrics, sport, cranial and so on but health belongs to everyone and Laura particularly enjoys the variety that every person brings to the office each day making her a very varied clinician. Her belief is that health belongs to all and to offer that help to each and every body is her life goal.

8 Headache changing tips to reduce the pain in your head

1. **Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate!**

The best advice that I was given from a massage therapist- drink water like a painkiller for headaches! It certainly beats taking painkillers but making sure that you drink enough water in a day (approx. 1.5L), not only helps prevent headaches but it helps the muscles work better by keeping the fascia (a layer between muscles) hydrated and healthy. Keeping hydrated also keeps the skin fresh and can help with acne. Also think about limiting your caffeine which can be found in tea, coffee, cola, energy drinks, chocolate. Caffeine dehydrates the body and does not contribute towards the 1.5L day water intake and can contribute towards headaches and anxiety.

2. **Think posture!**

Scary fact, your head weighs about 10-12lb, this is about the same weight as a bowling ball! Now, think about the amount of time we spend looking down at our mobile phone or ipads these days. For every 15 degrees forward our head moves, we add more pressure onto the spine; at just 15 degrees, our head now adds 27lbs of pressure and at 30 degrees, a huge 40lbs of pressure- I don't know if you have ever been on a diet and tried to loose 40lbs, I have and it's a lot!
Now imagine what all of that pressure will do to the joints, ligaments, nerves and muscles in that area, working almost 3 times as hard just to keep your head upright?!

Top tip: When sitting or standing, try to keep the shoulders relaxed and imagine your head is floating and light. Tuck your chin in slightly and try to keep your earlobe in line with the tip of your shoulder. That is the right position for your head to be. I also try and imagine that my shoulder blades are squeezing together and down my back rather than sticking my chest out which actually is counter intuitive. So to encourage this correct posture, tuck your chin into your neck, keeping it parallel with the floor to make a double chin effect- hold this for 5 seconds and repeat 10 times. This exercise activates the postural muscles at the back of your neck so that they can do their job properly again! Do this several times a day, especially if you are working on a laptop, mobile phone, ipad or looking down lots.

3. **Speaking of tech…**

Did you know that technology is one of the principle causes of the modern day posture epidemic? Postural related problems are one of the biggest causes of neck and shoulder pain that we see in clinic today. Not just hours on the pc or phone/ tablet time but also slouching in front of the TV, slouching against the headboard reading (also a great cause of low back pain)- all of these contribute to increased stress on your neck, possibly leading to your headaches and migraines.

Top tip: When using your phone or tablet, try and bring it to eye level to reduce the force going through your neck. If you are reading, prop the tablet on a cushion or recipe stand. Make sure that you are holding your phone to your ear when making and receiving calls and do not wedge your phone between your neck and shoulder- even invest in a good headset if you make lots of calls! If you are working at a computer, try and get the monitor to eye level again either by investing in a stand or placing it on top of enough books that keep you from looking down. If you work from a laptop, again, invest in a stand and use a separate keyboard and mouse so that you aren't constantly looking down.

4. Carry it correctly!

I can not tell you how many people I have seen who have come in with neck and shoulder pain yet carry tote bags (usually on the painful side) that weigh the same as a small suitcase! Everything but the kitchen sink goes in there yet when we talk about this, more than half of the contents aren't even necessary. Your bag should not exceed more than 10% of your bodyweight, when it does, it places stresses and strain through your head, neck and shoulders; leading to pain and headaches.

Top tip: Think about the way in which you carry your bag, if it is the same side each time; this will create stress and strain through the same side of your body each and every day. Think about swapping sides, choose a backpack or a crossbody bag in order to distribute the weight more evenly through the body. Always check the contents of your bag and ask yourself what do you really need?

5. Treat time, but choose wisely..

Not only is it a moment on the lips, a lifetime on the hips but easting sugary, processed foods or even eating irregularly; dieting, fasting, skipping meals can all contribute to a sudden drop or spike in blood sugar levels which in turn could be the cause of your headaches and migraines.

Top tip: Eating small, regular meals that are prepared with natural (organic is best, especially the dirty dozen) ingredients is the best way to keep your blood glucose in check. Avoid overly processed, packaged foods with ingredients that you cannot say! I like to think that if it hasn't been pulled from the ground or from a tree or plant, pulled from the sea or feeds from the earth then it isn't so great for me! Try and replace refined sugars for healthy alternatives and if you are craving a sweet treat, reach for some fresh fruit or dried fruit if you must- a date perhaps? Sweet and feels way more naughty than they actually are!

6. Sleep deep

Did you know that you spend one third of your life in bed?! Having the correct sleeping position is absolutely essential to the alignment of your spine. Not only this but disturbed sleeping patterns, late nights and fatigue can trigger headaches and migraines.

Top tip: Sleeping on your stomach is the absolute worst position to sleep in! This causes no end of restrictions and problems for the whole length of your spine! Sleeping in a neutral position that maintains the normal curvature of your spine is what you need to

find. This is done by sleeping on your side; the mattress is a whole other story but for your neck; your neck must stay neutral, if the pillows are too low, your head will drop and your neck will hunch. If the pillows are too high, your head will be pushed away from your spine and you will feel a pull. I often find that the best way to achieve a neutral position is by using a regular polyester filled pillow (for support) and a feather pillow which will go soft, but this cradles my neck keeping my head and neck in a neutral position. If you are a side sleeper only, a memory foam pillow allows the cervical spine to be in a relaxed position without too much bend in it.

BONUS: If you struggle to sleep generally, try minimising your screen time and avoid looking at technology for at least 1 hour before bed- the artificial light from the tech tricks the body into thinking that it is still daytime so that you don't 'switch off'. Try soothing music, reading, a bedtime meditation (easier than you think once you get the hang of it and there are lots of apps these days to guide you through a meditation), lavender candles or oil (natural oils, non petroleum candles) and chamomile tea is always a nice bedtime drink to soothe and calm- some also come with lavender too!

7. **No stress**

Easier said than done, right? Stress is a huge factor when it comes to headaches and migraines. In this day and age, we all live in a fast paced, chaotic world where there is little chance to switch off from everything. I once read that everybody should meditate for at least 20 minutes every day, unless you are too busy and then it should be for one hour! How true is that?! Just taking 10 minutes me time to repose in a busy day can save you hours at the end of the day- especially if it is going to save you a headache. You simply must put yourself first so that you can give your best and be your best at whatever the task at hand is that day.

Top tip: As I said earlier, there are lots of guided meditation apps these days from 2 minutes to one hour long. Not to mention meditation retreats! I do find yoga, which is a pre meditative workout, is incredibly beneficial for helping meditate and for just resetting one's self. Many successful businesses and athletes have found the benefits of meditation and mindfulness- why not give it a try? Not just once, commit to 6 weeks or a reasonable amount of time to work on your meditation practise, rather like doing the couch to 5k! Let that stress just slip away!

8. **Done and dusted- now get adjusted!**

Now all that is left to do is to go and see your local chiropractor for a check-up! Chiropractors look at the alignment of the spine to make sure that your nervous system is working at its optimum. There is no better way that to get a hands on chiropractic assessment to see what the underlying cause of this headaches is- and how best to get rid of them!