

## CAUSES

- Cervicogenic headaches (CGH) are associated with musculoskeletal dysfunction arising from the neck. They account for **15- 20% of all headaches** and are characterized by **muscle imbalance** (weakness and tightness) and **poor posture**.
- CGH are classically a consequence of poor sustained posture like sitting at a desk for long periods or sleeping on your tummy at night. Patients classically display a **forward head position** with chin poke and **rounded shoulders** and usually present with **decreased strength** and **endurance** in the deep neck flexors and increased tension in the posterior neck muscles.
- CGH are common post whiplash or concussion, in hairdressers, carpenters, truck drivers and office workers.

## SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- **Unilateral pain** radiating from the back of the head.
- Evidence of cervical dysfunction, usually **restricted range of motion**.
- **Pain provocation** with **sustained awkward head postures** + pain reproduction with trigger point over the upper cervical or occipital region.
- **Moderate - severe intensity** but non- throbbing.



## WHAT ELSE COULD IT BE?

- Other headaches such as Tension Type Headache and Migraines need to be ruled out as primary headache as physiotherapy will not be as effective for these presentations.
- It is important to recognise 'red flag' symptoms that require further medical evaluation. There include severe sudden onset, neurological signs, high fever, profound dizziness, vision disturbance.

## ASSESSMENT & OUTCOME MEASURES

- Detailed **Postural Assessment**: specific to postures associated with occupation or activities.
- **Active movement analysis**: including the Cervical Flexion Rotation Test which will determine a loss in range of motion of the upper cervical joints often seen in CGH.
- Tests for **cervical sensorimotor control**.
- **Muscle activation, length & strength** testing.
- Manual **palpation** of soft tissue and joints.

## MANAGEMENT

- Physiotherapy can be very effective in treating Cervicogenic Headaches.
- Treatment consists of **postural correction** and work place set up, **manual therapy** to help with joint restriction and muscular tightness and then importantly **exercise rehabilitation** to help strengthen the neck and correct muscle imbalances.
- Progressive strength and endurance program in a range of functional positions.

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Lluch, E., Santacruz-Zaragoza, S., Gomez-Contreras, P., Cook, E .C. (2016). Physical examination tests for screening and diagnosis of cervicogenic headache: Manual Therapy (Vol 21). Elsevier.

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