

1 in 3 people suffer from headaches, some worse than others. The type and nature of headaches are varied and can range from full blown migraines to tension headaches.

Most headaches have a musculoskeletal component which can lead to nerve and blood vessel irritation. Some of the areas that commonly contribute to the onset of headaches are tightness of the upper neck muscles and joints, jaw pain, sinus congestion and inflammation, postural problems and eye strain.



Differentiating what type of headache you are experiencing is an important part of managing the problem. Following is a description of some of the most common types of headaches that are experienced.

Migraine is responsible for more job absenteeism and disrupted family life than any other headache type. Women experience migraines at least three times more often than men do, and this may be due to hormonal influences. While migraines occur in childhood, they generally strike in the twenties or thirties. Migraine is considered a vascular headache because it is associated with changes in the size of the arteries in and outside of the brain. The nerves around the blood vessels release chemicals which cause inflammation eliciting pain signals into the brain. Migraine often begins as a dull ache and then develops into a constant, throbbing and pulsating pain that you may feel at the temples, as well as the front or back of one side of the head. The pain is usually accompanied by nausea and vomiting, and sensitivity to light and noise.

There are two types of **tension-type headaches**: episodic and chronic. Episodic headaches occur randomly and are often the result of temporary stress, anxiety, fatigue or anger. A chronic tension-type headache is one that occurs just about every day, and may have been going on for months. Symptoms include soreness in your temples, a tightening band-like sensation around your head, a pulling feeling, pressure sensations, and contracting head and neck muscles. The primary difference between episodic and chronic headaches is the frequency and severity of some symptoms.

Cluster headaches are called this because the attacks come in groups. The pain arrives with little, if any, warning, and is described as the most severe and intense of any headache type. It generally lasts from 30 to 45 minutes. Most sufferers experience one to four headaches a day during a cluster period. Cluster headaches frequently surface during the morning or late at night; the cluster cycle can last weeks or months and then can disappear for months or years.

Sinus headaches occur usually as the result of an allergic reaction, or an infection, which leads to the sinuses becoming inflamed and the inflammation then leads to localized pain. Symptoms include a congested feeling, discharge, local pain around the eyes and forehead and some light headedness.

A wide range of gentle, osteopathic techniques may be helpful for relieving the various causes and symptoms of headaches you may be experiencing.

Dr Patrick Kuhn owns Emerald Osteopathy in the Dandenong Ranges in Victoria. He has a special interest in treating headaches and is available for consultation by calling 03 5968 6889 or visit www.alignment.com.au