

Advice for the Avoidance and/or Self-treatment of Headache & Migraine*

***Headaches & migraines can be due to more serious medical pathologies (this is unlikely-don't worry) so you should always consult your GP if you are suffering with them to rule these out first! Headaches have a number of common causes and you can help identify the likely cause/s of yours in the following way:**

1. Do you drink lots of tea, coffee, coke or alcohol? These drinks are diuretics and may lead to dehydration, a common cause of headaches. Dehydration can also be due to drinking too little fluids; is this case? Caffeine, and caffeine withdrawal, are also the NUMBER 1 headache trigger you can ingest, so cutting it out altogether may be wise (you will get a really bad withdrawal headache for 2-4 days if you stop suddenly though). Try drinking less diuretics (or switching coffee for tea or decaf) and more water; does this relieve your headaches?
2. Get your eyes tested. Headaches can be due to your eyes straining when trying to focus-you may need glasses! Also some people may strain their eyes using computers too much, or when reading (coloured plastic transparencies can help) so take regular breaks.
3. If you have ruled out serious medical pathology, dehydration and eye strain then it is very likely your headaches/migraines are due to tight muscles/fascia in your neck & shoulders and 'trigger points' referring pain into the head/eyes.

Are your neck & shoulders tight? Do you hold your head forward? Do you work with computers? Do you suffer with stress? If so it is likely to be a soft tissue (muscle/fascia) problem. A Massage Therapist trained in Trigger Point Therapy & Myofascial Release should be able to get rid of your headaches with a short course of treatment (4-8 treatments)! Postural advice and/or a workstation assessment may be recommended.

4. If you don't feel your headaches are due to the reasons discussed so far, they may be due to hormone fluctuations or food/drink/medication triggers. Keep a 'headache diary' for 4 weeks noting in it when you get headaches, what you eat, your time of month (if female) and your level of stress. You may notice patterns (ie headaches when you are stressed, drink coffee, ovulate etc). Food or drink triggers can cause a headache up to 2 DAYS after they are ingested, consider! Also, your food & drink triggers (eg. Chocolate) may not always cause a headache if your other triggers (eg. Stress) are at a low level. When you have identified a trigger, exclude it from your diet as much as possible. It is important to note that even if your headaches have one of these 'triggers', Advanced Massage can usually still help them considerably.

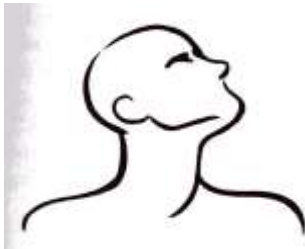
Read: Heal your headache, the 123 program. New York, Workman Publishing. Buchholz, D (2002)

...for more information on identifying triggers, getting off 'rebounding' medication and headache avoidance.

5. Try taking a B-vitamin complex with high levels of B12 & B2, 3-400mg Magnesium Citrate and feverfew OR butterbur (try individually). Does this reduce/stop your headaches?
6. If you have ruled out all the headache/migraine reasons discussed so far then it is worth seeing an Osteopath to assess if you have any spinal/structural problems which may be causing them.

Self-Stretches*

*Most headaches are at least part due to tight muscles in the neck & shoulders and muscle imbalances. The stretches below will stretch all the major muscle groups involved. Hold all stretches for 15-30 seconds and breath out/relax as you stretch:



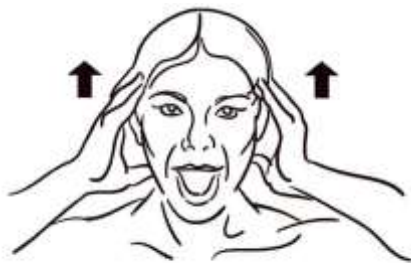
Stretch exercise 1: Clavicular head



Stretch exercise 2: Sternal head



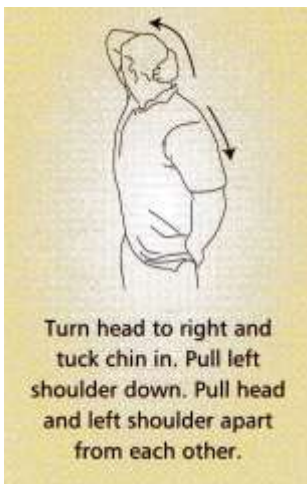
Stretch exercise: Scalenes



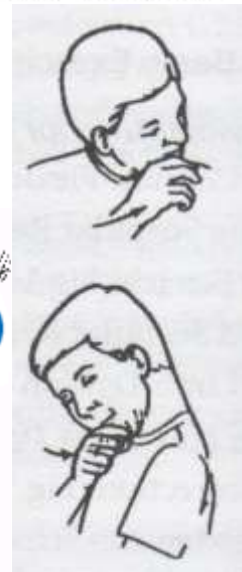
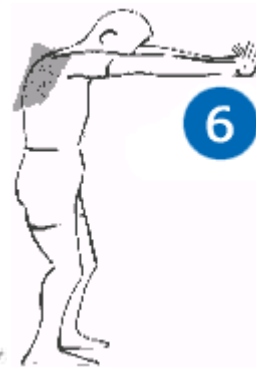
Stretch exercise: Temporalis

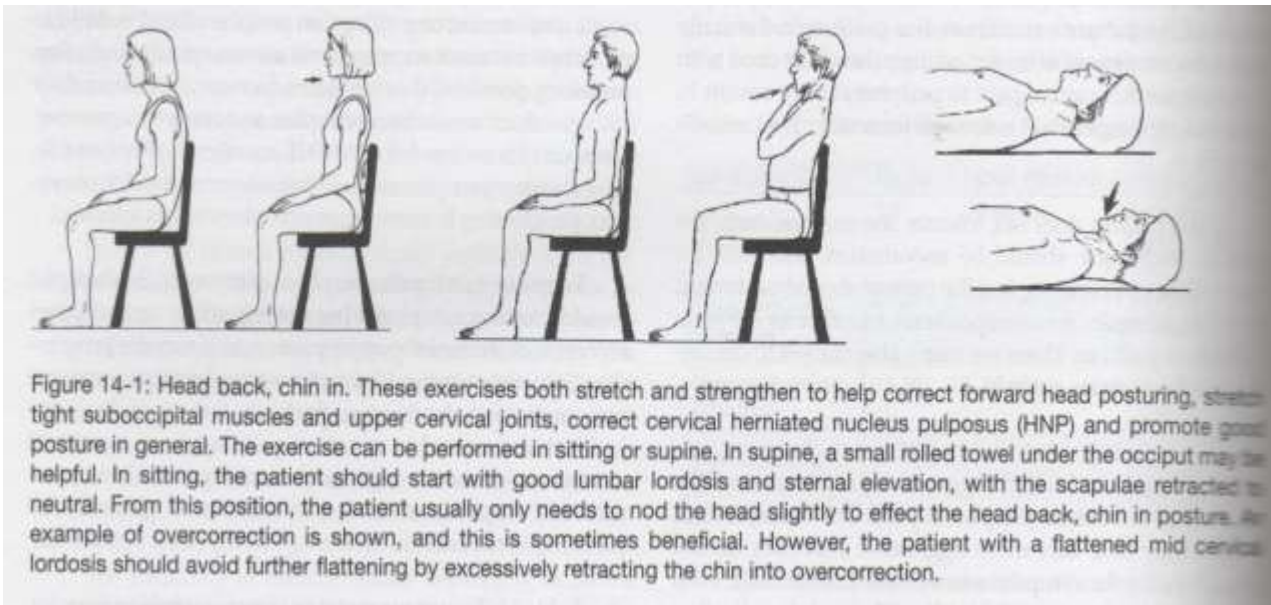


Stretch exercise 1: Trapezius



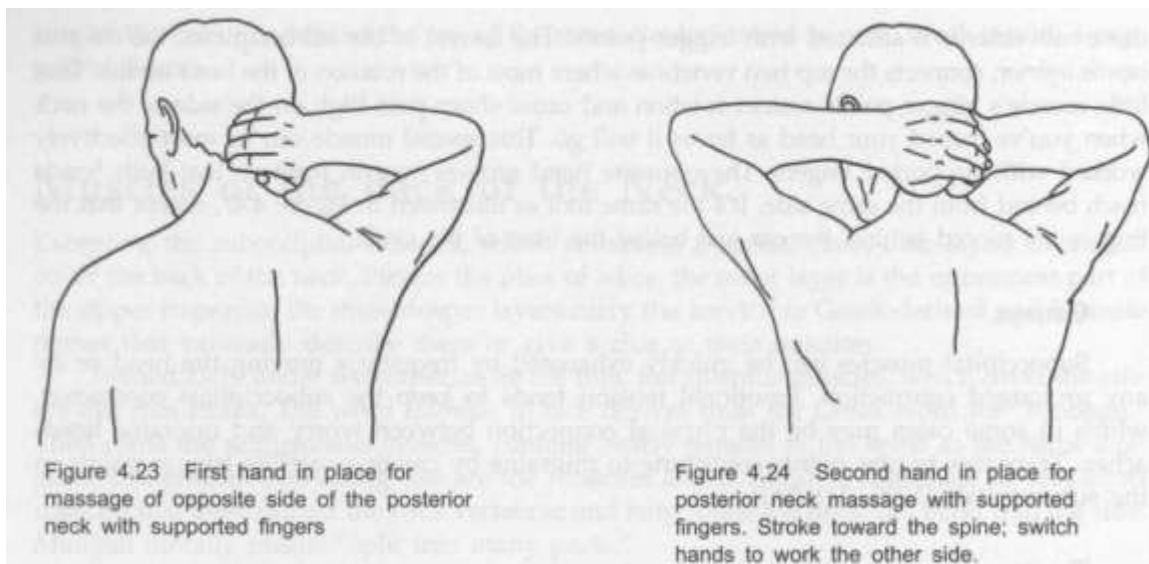
Stretch exercise 2: Pectoralis major





*** Other Self Help Exercises:**

1. Use your finger tips to massage your temples doing small, firm circles through the tissue. Treat painful 'trigger points' by holding pressure on the painful spots until the pain starts to ease (8-20 seconds).
2. Use your fingertips & thumb to massage your scalp, again doing firm circles like you are washing your hair. Make sure you 'move your scalp' over the skull beneath.
3. Work the lower, back of your skull (& muscles); again holding trigger points until they ease.
4. Interlock your fingers and 'squeeze' the back of your neck using your palms. After, use your right 'supported fingers' to work the left side of your neck & vice versa (see pic below).



5. Use your right hand to squeeze down your left shoulder (trapezius). Repeat on the other side. Hold any trigger points between your thumb & forefinger (as shown). A hard rubber dog's ball, rounder's ball (as shown) or back knobber/thera-cane can be used to massage the backs of the shoulders and treat trigger points.



Figure 4.12 Massage of trapezius number 1 with fingers and thumb

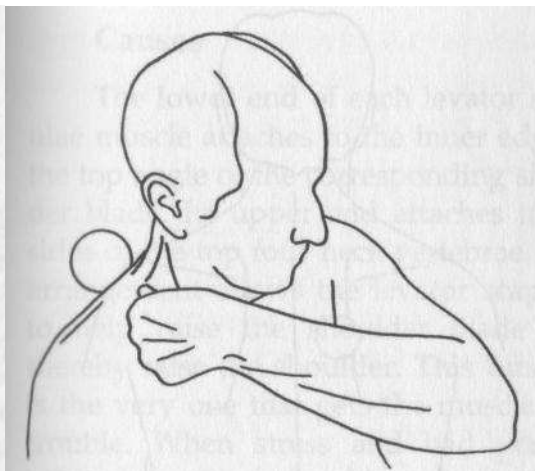
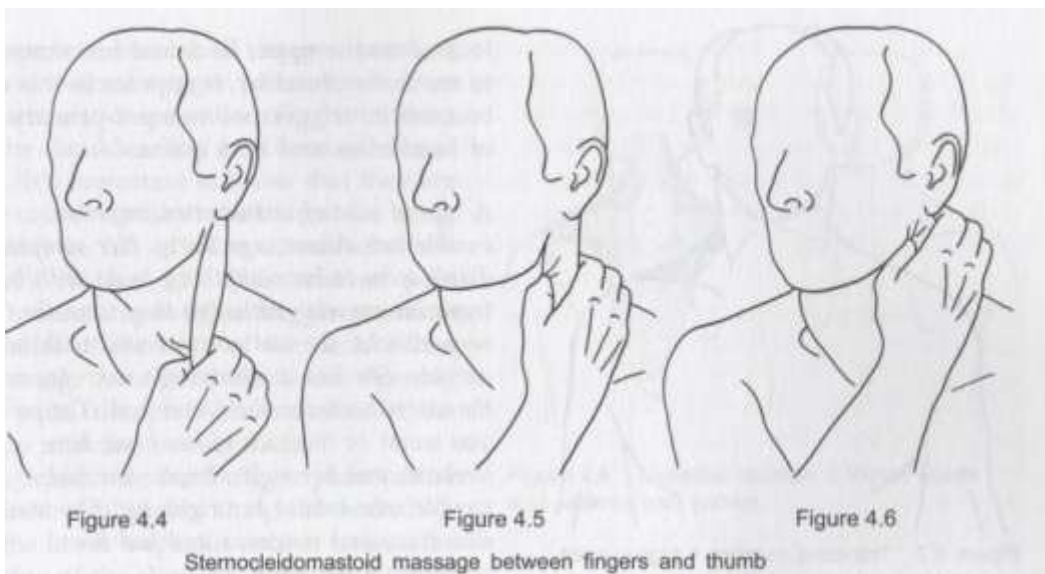


Figure 4.13 Trapezius massage with supported thumb against ball on the wall or bed

6. Work your Sternocleidomastoid muscle on each side (as shown in picture below) holding any painful trigger points until they ease.



7. AFTER treating trigger points/self-massage ALWAYS stretch the area worked!

*Information & pictures taken from 'The Trigger Point Therapy Manual', 'The Concise Book of Muscles' & 'Trigger Point Therapy for Myofascial Pain'.

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