

by Libby Carty McNamee



# OH, MY ACHING HEAD!

## Stop the Madness Without Medication

**W**hen an excruciating migraine is pounding in your head, or a nagging headache disrupting your day, you just want to know how you can end the incessant pain. You know you could just pop a couple of pills, but is that really your best remedy? What if you could prevent the pain from returning rather than just masking a recurring problem?

According to local chiropractor and licensed physical therapist and acupuncturist Dr. William Roodman, "The most important thing is establishing the type of headache from which you are suffering and trying to identify its underlying cause. Only then can you determine the most effective means of treatment."

The tension headache, which consists of pressure and tightening on both sides of the head and/or neck, is the most common for those seeking relief. Dr. Roodman explains, "Since its origin is often physical, it requires a lasting physical solution, not just a temporary chemical one." In his 19 years of practice, he has found that many patients experienced dramatic relief from tension headaches within just a few visits for "manual medicine" such as spinal manipulation and physical therapy. Others noticed a decrease in both frequency and intensity.

According to the latest research, Dr. Roodman notes, a diet high in omega-6 trans-fats can also play a role in causing headaches, adding an inflammatory component. He suggests a diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids of fish oil; riboflavin, and magnesium found in bananas.

Recent VCU grad Krissy Clarke suffered from unbearable headaches for months, one lasting for three weeks straight. The headaches were often so bad she couldn't sit or lie down, despite frequent dizziness. Regular doses of aspirin and ibuprofen had no effect, and she was worried her body was becoming resistant to the medications. Her family physician diagnosed her condition as an atypical migraine since she was sensitive to light but didn't have the usual nausea or stomach problems.

As a last resort she consulted a local chiropractor. His analysis was that her neck was bent forward out of proper alignment because her spine was not shaped correctly. After the first two weeks of treatment, her headaches tapered off. She had no headaches at all for the following two to three months. In addition, her severe seasonal allergies were gone. Krissy raves, "I left every appointment feeling like a whole new person. I was standing straighter and taller, and the pressure and stress were gone. I finally felt how I was supposed to feel."

Surprisingly, a common cause of headaches is grinding or clenching one's teeth while sleeping. "Twenty percent of my patients do it and have absolutely no idea they are," notes Peter Matkowsky, DDS. "Often this goes undiagnosed because many physicians are unaware that involuntary clenching could ever cause a migraine." As part of his practice, Dr. Matkowsky does custom fittings for an FDA-approved dental device, called an "NTI." Worn at night, this tiny clear plastic device makes clenching virtually impossible, helping stop headaches and related pain. "We have treated so many patients with this NTI device with a ter-

rific outcome," he raves. "By reducing the intensity of the clenching while you're asleep, it minimizes the source of the pain—often in just a few days."

A member of the National Headache Foundation, Dr. Roodman has found that the most misunderstood headache is the migraine. Contrary to public perception, a migraine is defined by its unilateral throbbing nature, not merely its intensity. There are also more female sufferers—27 percent of women compared to seven percent of men, peaking at age 40. Of those women, migraines are often hormonally triggered with 70 percent getting one right before their period.

Undiagnosed allergies of all kinds can cause migraines as well as other chronic health issues. While many people associate allergies with just hives or constant sneezing, the Nambudripad's Allergy Elimination Technique (NAET) is based on the premise that allergies can affect you on many more levels than you may be aware—and that a person can overcome an allergy rather than simply putting up with it. Natural, drugless, painless, and non-invasive, NAET uses a unique muscle testing system to identify physical allergies. NAET then permanently eliminates the allergy, often in one session.

"The human body can be allergic to anything, even things that are healthy for you. Don't discount that whatever issue you have might be due to an allergy," cautions Kristen Couture, co-owner of the Richmond NAET Clinic. According to NAET, one can be allergic to anything from Vitamin C and yeast to one's own hormones, which could trigger women's monthly migraines. Ms. Couture herself suffered from migraines as well as panic attacks, irritable bowel syndrome, weight loss, and fibromyalgia before NAET treated her latent allergies for sugar, coffee, chocolate, and Vitamin C.

Carrie Williar, account executive for **V** Magazine for Women, suffered from debilitating headaches for years. The NAET process discovered her allergy to yeast. "With every sandwich, bagel, cracker, and doughnut I ate and glass of wine I drank, I was filling my body with something it couldn't handle—and giving myself pounding headaches," she explains. Treatment brought immediate relief. Now she has only occasional headaches. "For something so simple, painless, and cost effective, I recommend it to anyone who is looking for relief from having to take regular prescription pain medicine."

A wide range of other alternative treatments exist, including acupuncture and hypnosis; supplements like ginger or feverfew; lighting changes such as tinted lenses or carefully chosen artificial lighting; changing the way you sit at your desk; or dietary improvements.

So before you pop that pill, consider what may be the root of the problem. Keep a headache diary—noting foods, activities, and circumstances that precede a headache. Consider if there may be non-pharmaceutical, lasting relief for your pain.

The cause could be as minor as caffeine withdrawal, monosodium glutamate, ten-

sion, hormones, or eyestrain—and the solution as simple as making a few lifestyle changes. However, ongoing headaches could be caused by more serious underlying problems—including lupus; meningitis or encephalitis; hypoglycemia; anemia; and medication overuse—so be sure to consult a physician if your headaches are severe or frequent (see chart below).

Whatever the root, treating the source can cure the problem and send the pain packing. Not only that, treating the source can improve your overall health and zest for life. **V**

**Consult Your Healthcare Provider If Your Headache...**

- is sudden and severe
- occurs with fever, stiff neck, or uncontrollable vomiting
- causes confusion or loss of consciousness
- is persistent, when previously you've been headache free
- is accompanied by numbness, weakness, or vision loss
- begins after the age of fifty years
- begins after head injury or other trauma
- interferes with your ability to function normally at work or in social situations
- requires medication more than two days per week.

From the National Headache Foundation, headaches.org,

For more information, go to headaches.org or migraineprevention.com. Contact Dr. Roodman of the Advanced Wellness Center at 804-673-WELL; Dr. Matkowsky of Family Dentistry at 804-897-3339; Richmond NAET Clinic at 804-354-6238 or richmondnaetclinic.org; or naet.com.

**V** Libby Carty **McNamee** is a local freelance writer, ready to move her bottle of aspirin to the back of the medicine cabinet because she won't need it any time soon.