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## **Children Get Headaches Too**

By Peter Fysh, DC

Headaches in children can be a common complaint. Although it is not unusual for a child to complain of headaches, it is equally important that the symptoms not be overlooked. Occasionally, childhood headaches may be a warning of a serious health problem, and therefore should be carefully investigated.

A recent United States nationwide survey revealed that of 923 children under the age of 15 years who presented to chiropractic clinics, 76 children, or 8.2 percent of the group surveyed, reported headache as their chief complaint.

A further interesting statistic from this study: on an average, 30 percent of these children were reported to be free of their headaches after receiving four spinal adjustments.

### **Case Report**

An interesting case was that of Scott, age 13, who presented with severe neck pain caused by shaking his head vigorously after swimming the previous night. Scott arrived at the clinic in considerable distress, having slept little during the night. During the case history, the patient mentioned that he had a history of headaches about every other day for the past five to six years. This was not uncommon history related by headache patients to their chiropractors.

After taking the history and completing a thorough physical examination, it was decided to take x-rays of Scott's spine. The x-rays revealed no fractures or dislocations, but showed a rather severe misalignment of several cervical vertebrae as being the likely cause of the problem.

After a careful and thorough evaluation, Scott's treatment was commenced. A little light muscle stretching, followed by two adjustments to the neck and an ice pack for ten minutes, and the treatment was over.

Instructions were given to repeat the ice packs at regular intervals throughout the day.

The following day, Scott arrived at the clinic with significant improvement in the range of motion of his neck. His treatment was similar to that provided the previous day, and he was requested to return in three days. On that next visit, he reported that the headaches, which had affected his life so much in the past, had apparently ceased.

During the following month, Scott reported experiencing only two mild headaches and after several further neck adjustments his headaches were completely gone.

Scott's case is not an isolated one. His response is similar to many patients, both young and old, who get relief from their headaches through spinal adjustments. The interesting feature of Scott's case, however, was that it took a somewhat severe problem to bring him to the chiropractor, and as a result, he was relieved of his chronic headaches which otherwise may have gone on for many years.

### **Headache Patterns**

Most patients with headaches who arrive at a chiropractic clinic have either migraine headaches or, more commonly, cervicogenic headaches, i.e., headaches which come from their neck or cervical spine and involve muscle tension. This latter cause of headache has been widely recognized and reported in the scientific literature.

An interesting report in the British Medical Journal, (1):1956, went so far as to confirm that headache and eye pain in some children was related to tenderness of the transverse process of the 1st cervical vertebra. The report went on to state that this finding was not uncommon in school children and had been noted to occur as early as five years of age. The unfortunate feature of this problem, the author stated, was that the headaches frequently persisted for many years and gave rise to the excessive taking of aspirin. Furthermore, palpation of the base of the skull (basiocciput) and of the adjoining neck muscles and cervical spine, while not usually forming part of a routine medical examination, showed positive findings of tenderness in most of the cases studied.

This report from the British Medical Journal accurately describes the most common type of headache pattern seen and managed in chiropractic clinics. The treatment usually requires only gentle adjustment of the vertebrae of the cervical spine, to restore proper function, and thereby to remove any associated nerve irritation which might be responsible for increased muscle tension in the neck and scalp.

Headaches are not a complaint which children should have to endure. Accurate diagnosis to rule out headaches of organic origin, and quick and effective treatment of the commonly encountered headaches of cervicogenic origin, is something that can be provided readily by the chiropractor.

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