

Pacific Rim Headache Center

Patient Information Sheet 8

Why Not Treat the Cause?

I've heard the question hundreds if not thousands of times, "Why are you just giving me drugs to cover up the pain and not treat the underlying cause?" In the last thirty years there have been a few billion dollars spent by brilliant scientist to understand what causes and treats headaches. Despite this colossal effort, we are just starting to understand the true cause. We do know that the vast majority of headaches, even severe disabling headaches don't have a simple, fixable cause. It is usually a very complex interaction between a person's genetics in the headache alarm system and sometimes acquired factors, such as changes in hormones, poor sleep or head injuries. So rather than headache being a warning that something is wrong, it is a problem in the pain-alarm system itself. Headache specialist wish more than anyone that headaches had a simple, fixable cause. Our jobs would be much easier if this was true

Billions of healthcare dollars are spent every year, with brain scans and lab tests looking for simple causes . . . and they are almost always normal. One study showed that out of 1100 people with daily headaches, only 2 had a positive test, telling of some underlying problem that needs to be fixed. Patients sometimes get the idea that those of us who treat headaches either don't care enough to try and find the cause or we are too stupid (or lazy) to look. That is absolutely not true.

The general public is often mislead into believing that common headaches are caused by simple problems such as: neck problems, spine out of alignment, TMJ problems, sinus problems, allergies, food intolerance, long hair, stress, vitamin or mineral deficiencies, mold growing in the house, parasites, adrenal problems, brain tumors, blood clots, aneurysms or who knows what. But those things very rarely are the cause of headaches. We wish (as least the not-so-serious things like vitamin deficiencies) were the cause.

Even though headaches are often the result of complex genetic problems, they are still treatable, but they are usually not curable. Fortunately, headaches often get better or go away on their own. Just like with most diseases, the best that we can do is to control the disorder. There is no cure for diabetes, but it is very treatable.

One of the most common reasons that a patient does not get better is that they keep searching for a simple, fixable cause and are not committed to treatments that have been proven to work.

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