



by Max W. Cohen, MD, FAAOS

Could your headache be a cervicogenic headache?

Maybe you experienced a whiplash injury and now are having headaches that feel like migraines. Or perhaps you have had pain radiate into your arm for a while, but now are having headaches, too. If one of these scenarios describes you, then chances are you aren't having an ordinary headache. You may be experiencing what is called a cervicogenic headache, a headache caused by referred pain from the neck. This type of headache always is accompanied by neck symptoms, such as a stiff neck, neck pain, tingling, or numbness radiating down an arm. If you don't have any neck symptoms along with your headache, then your

Your Headache May Not Be 'All in Your Head'

headache is not cervicogenic.

What causes it?

Most cervicogenic headaches are caused by neck muscle strains, such as those that occur with whiplash. Cervicogenic headaches also may be caused by other injuries to – or degenerative problems in – the cervical (or neck) area of the spine. Sometimes, the injury itself causes the referred headache, but in other cases the injury simply aggravates an existing degenerative disc problem or existing arthritis in the spine. In other cases, the headaches come on gradually as degenerative problems worsen.

What can be done?

Our goal is to treat the underlying cause.

The most common cause is strain of the paraspinal muscles that attach directly to the head. When these muscles are strained, you may feel that strain as a headache. To relieve the problem, we usually prescribe muscle relaxants, rest, ice and anti-inflammatories. Most people get better with those treatments.

Disc problems are a less common cause. These patients often have a disc that began

degenerating earlier but experienced no pain until an injury aggravated the problem. Treatment may include rest, anti-inflammatories, physical therapy and cervical traction.

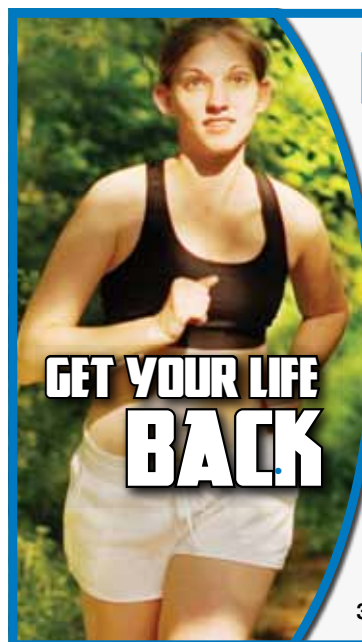
We also can do three types of injections to help with cervicogenic headaches:

EPIDURAL INJECTIONS. If the problem is due to inflammation around the nerve roots, an epidural injection may alleviate pain.

FACET INJECTIONS. If arthritis is irritating the paraspinal muscles, an injection in the facet joints in the affected spinal area may help the pain.

NERVE ROOT BLOCKS. If the cause is occipital neuritis – a problem in the uppermost part of the cervical spine at the C2 nerve root – an injection directly into that area often will relieve pain.

Although patients often describe their cervicogenic



Have a back or spine problem that's keeping you from enjoying life?

Call us today for an evaluation. As the Triad's only medical practice devoted exclusively to spine treatment and surgery, we offer hope – and help – to patients suffering from all types of spinal diseases and injuries.



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headaches as migraines, most are not really migraines – and usually don't respond to treatments for that disorder. However, a cervical spine problem occasionally will bring on true migraines in patients with a history of them. When that occurs, we typically work with a headache specialist to treat the pain.

What's the prognosis?

When we treat the underlying cervical spine problem, patients often find their headaches go away, too. Surgery is rarely needed. Perhaps 10 percent of patients end up

undergoing surgery.

If you have headaches associated with neck pain and would like an evaluation, please call our office at 336-333-6306 or visit us at www.spineandscoliosisdocs.com.

Max W. Cohen, MD, FAAOS, the founding physician of **Spine & Scoliosis Specialists**, is the only doctor in the Triad with double fellowship training in spine and scoliosis surgery. He completed his training at **Cornell University's prestigious Hospital for Special Surgery**, the top-ranked orthopaedics hospital in the U.S., according to U.S. News & World Report.

Headaches Are No 'Clowning Around' Matter

Rick Chaney doesn't remember ever having a headache until he suffered serious neck injuries in an automobile accident in 2007. Then, his dark days began. "The migraine would start at the left side of my head and go right up the top, right up to the front," he says. "It was like it was crushing right down on a nerve, and it wouldn't stop. It was horrible. I would have to go to bed and turn out the lights." In addition, he had excruciating neck pain that traveled down his left shoulder, radiating from the C-5-6-7 area of his upper spine. That meant he had almost no range of motion in his neck. He tried virtually every treatment, from physical therapy to injections. None helped. His doctor offered little hope of improvement.

Then Chaney asked to be referred to **Max W. Cohen, MD**, who had treated him years earlier for a back problem. Dr. Cohen tried conservative treatments first, then told Chaney that he believed a surgical procedure called an *anterior cervical discectomy fusion* would help his condition, which involved degenerative spinal changes, bone spurs and pinched nerves.

After surgery in 2008, Chaney found that his disabling neck pain and horrible headaches were gone. Today, he has returned to the career he loves – making children smile as a very active clown named **Jots**, working alongside his wife, who performs as **SonShyne**, in **Circus Daze** (www.circusdaze.com).

"I walk on stilts, I juggle, and I balance an eight-foot cane on my chin," Chaney says.



Rick Chaney can now juggle, walk on stilts and balance a cane on his chin when he performs as Jots, along with wife Monica as SonShyne.

Photo by Jay Lovejoy