

Massage and Tension Headaches

Massage works by increasing oxygen and blood flow to tense muscles. During a tension headache, muscles of the scalp, jaw and neck are tightly contracted. The blood vessels supplying oxygen to these muscles are constricted, so that the muscles must work without an adequate supply of nutrients. It is believed that this combination of muscle spasm and inadequate blood supply is the main cause of pain in tension headaches. Massage helps relax the contracted muscles.

Tension type headaches are often triggered by stress or just the anticipation of a stressful experience. Massage can help overcome your body's response to stress by reducing tension and improving circulation. If you have any neck problems, check with your doctor before trying any massage technique.

If you are unable to see a professional massage therapist, you can practice massage at home, either alone or with a partner to assist you. Imagine your muscles as loose and soft. If they feel hard and knotted, work to gently soften them.

Here are some basic techniques that may help when you feel a headache coming on:

Step 1~ To begin relaxing the muscles in your neck, let your head drop until your chin is almost resting on your chest. With your palms on the back of your head, press very gently so that you are stretching out your neck but not straining it.

Step 2~ Begin to work your thumbs and fingers down the back of your neck from your skull to your shoulders. Stretch your head gently from side to side now and then as you work.

Step 3~ Once your neck begins to feel more relaxed, work your fingers or thumbs up over your temples and ears, then back down to your neck.

Step 4~ Push your fingers or thumbs against your scalp and rotate them firmly in small circles.

Step 5~ Press the palms your hands against the sides of your head, using the most pressure at the softest points on either side. You can also pull up toward the top of your head.

Alternate these steps as you begin to feel what is working for you. Be sure to take breaks, occasionally stretching your neck to keep it loose.

If you experience sudden or intense pain during any massage, stop immediately. If you feel just a slight intensifying of your headache, however, continue on, remembering to breathe normally. Since headaches usually peak before they disappear, you may just need to get through the peak before you begin to feel relief.

Some key elements to good mental and physical health include: stretching, deep breathing, maintaining good posture, and exercise!