

# TIRED OF HEADACHES?

By Terri Phillips, MFT

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) Fact Sheet (March 2004), headaches are the most common disorder of the nervous system. Tension type headaches are reported by 2/3 of adult males and 80 % of adult females. These numbers are staggering and especially painful if you are the one with the headache. The report also indicates that “3000 migraine attacks occur every day for each million of the general population”.

There are different forms of headaches some more painful than others but all irritating to the headache sufferer. Many people don't seek out treatment for their headaches even though at times they can be disabling both to the individual and impact the family system. If one member of a family suffers from a headache, it affects the entire family. Family members may have to limit noise in the home or have periods of time with an emotionally absent caregiver due to their headache. The headache sufferer can also become depressed due to their lack of ability to function on days when the headache is severe.

There can be serious medical issues that produce headaches and anyone who suffers from regular or intense, unusual headaches should be evaluated by a medical doctor to rule out any serious concerns related to the brain. Once any serious medical issues are ruled out, the headache sufferer often has to resort to suffering in silence or trying a variety of medications in order to experience some relief.

The majority of people experience tension headaches which are often due to stress, lack of sleep, inadequate diet and exercise or a combination of these things. According to the authors of Healing Young Brains The Neurofeedback Solution (Hill & Castro 2009) who devoted an entire chapter of their book to headaches, “The economic impact of migraine headaches in the U.S. economy in 2007 was an estimated 12 billion dollars”. Migraine headaches tend to be extremely intense and often debilitating while tension headaches tend to be a more constant pain but less intense than the migraine. Research has suggested that migraine brainwave patterns are similar to seizure type brainwave patterns.

Due to the fact that headaches are specifically related to brainwave patterns, it stands to reason that changing those brainwave patterns will reduce headaches. Once the headache sufferer has done all they can to reduce stress, regulate eating patterns, exercise and rule out medical causes – Neurofeedback is the next step. This non-invasive form of treatment involves the provider placing sensors on the scalp and ears while the client is rewarded by way of a computer game when the calm brain waves are produced. Over the course of treatment, the brain learns to balance itself or regulate

its own patterns therefore reducing the amount and intensity of headaches. Often times the headache can actually be reduced or even eliminated during the treatment session.

With this cutting edge form of treatment, headache sufferers no longer need to suffer in silence. Families can be whole again with all members able to participate at their highest level of functioning. Imagine a world with minimal headaches and how medical costs would be reduced, ability to function at places of employment would drastically improve, quality of life would improve and quality of family life would improve significantly.

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