



# *Associated Neurologists of Southern Connecticut*

## *Health & Wellness Newsletter*

Volume 1, Number 2 May, 2010

### **What's Inside?**

- ◆ Living with Chronic Pain
- ◆ How Counseling helps with Headaches
- ◆ Non-Medication Approaches to Migraine
- ◆ Chronic Daily Headache
- ◆ Biofeedback
- ◆ Acupuncture
- ◆ Adolescent Stress & Chronic Pain Workshop
- ◆ Research Update

Visit us on the Web!

[www.ANSCHealth and Wellness.com](http://www.ANSCHealthandWellness.com)

### **Living with Headaches and Migraines**

By Peter McAllister, MD

Director, Headache Center



Migraine is a common disabling neurological condition, striking twelve percent of Americans, often smack in the prime of a work career or child rearing years. Intense throbbing head pain, nausea, light and sound sensitivity, and mental slowing are some of the symptoms that disable migraine sufferers, often leading to lost time from work and family.

Headache specialists utilize many medicines used to lessen the frequency and severity of migraine. However, there are many ways migraine sufferers can help themselves to lessen the burden of their condition, relieve pain, and lead more productive lives. YOU can control your own headaches, through lifestyle and diet changes, trigger avoidance, stress management, alternative /complementary treatments and services offered at Associated Neurologists of Southern Connecticut's Health and Wellness Center. Inside this issue of our newsletter we'll discuss how patients are beginning to take control of their headaches and their lives.

### **The ANSC Drop-in Headache Center**

- ◆ Services provided to current ANSC patients
- ◆ Immediate treatment for severe migraine and headache episodes
- ◆ No appointment is necessary
- ◆ Prevents unnecessary Emergency Room visits

[www.anscneuro.com/headachecenter.shtml](http://www.anscneuro.com/headachecenter.shtml)

*Helping You Live as Fully as Possible*





## Non-Medication Approaches to Migraine Management

By Peter McAllister, M.D.

Migraine is a chronic medical condition affecting nearly one in five women, and six percent of men. Scientists believe that migraine is a genetically inherited disorder, as nearly 70% of sufferers report a family history of migraine. However, among those who are “hard-wired” to experience migraine, there are many triggers that can increase the frequency and/or severity of migraine. These triggers can be controlled. Identifying and correcting triggers is an important part of a holistic approach to migraine therapy, and could make the difference between one headache a month and twenty!

Common migraine triggers include skipping meals, inadequate water intake, not getting enough sleep, untreated depression and anxiety, and certain foods. Many women experience more migraines during their menstrual period. It may surprise you to know that in research studies the number one trigger for migraines was stress and not those listed above. While we all have some stress in our lives, migraine sufferers appear to translate that stress directly into headache. Persistent untreated stress in a migraineur can lead, over time, to the development of [chronic daily headache](#), which is discussed in another article in this newsletter.

Once you have identified your own triggers, you must take steps to correct them. Eat right, drink plenty of water, and get more sleep. Seek treatment if anxiety or depression is getting the best of you. It's crucial to learn positive coping strategies for dealing with stress. These may include aerobic exercise, talk therapy, and meditation. At the ANSC Health and Wellness Center, we offer numerous “stress-busting” services including counseling/therapy, gentle yoga, hypnosis, biofeedback, acupuncture and massage. This holistic approach, along with medicines when necessary, completes the picture for excellence in migraine care.

### What is Biofeedback?

Biofeedback is a way of self-monitoring that can be used to help people learn how to control certain physical processes such as heart rate, rhythm and muscle tension. When under stress or during a headache episode, muscles contract and create tension, which increases pain. In addition, we sometimes unknowingly tense our muscles to protect ourselves from more pain, further exacerbating the problem. Biofeedback uses sensors connected to a computer detected, the computer emits a chime reduced their tension levels. Biofeedback of relaxation in the mind and body, while or memories. Headache sufferers and when they begin to feel the first warning signs of stress, worry or anxiety, which often precede headaches. Relaxing the mind and body can prevent or lessen the severity of a headache or migraine. In addition, biofeedback can help with chronic pain, insomnia, high blood pressure and stress.



to identify this rising tension. Once when the person has effectively helps people reach a targeted state focusing on positive thoughts, images migraineurs can use this technique

## Chronic Daily Headache: You May be Doing it to Yourself

By Peter McAllister, M.D.



The term Chronic Daily Headache (CDH) is a bit of a misnomer. You don't have to have an everyday headache, just lots of them (fifteen or more headache days a month). The vast majority of CDH were once infrequent, episodic migraines. However, something triggered these headaches to get out of control, and "transform" into CDH. If you're in a CDH pattern, it's important to break it as early as you can, as with time, the brain will get used to nearly every day pain. At this point, breaking the headache cycle becomes a Herculean task.

Researchers have identified several risk factors for transformation of episodic migraine into CDH. These include female gender, obesity, history of concussion, prolonged stress, psychological trauma and depression. However, the number one cause, believe it or not, is overuse of common pain relievers. These include anti-inflammatories such as Ibuprofen and Aleve, Excedrin, the butalbital (Fiorinal and Fioricet) and narcotics such as Vicodin and Percocet. It seems that the brains of migraine sufferers (but, interestingly, not non-migraineurs) "get hooked" on these pain pills, which rapidly leads to withdrawal headaches.

So, if you are a migraine sufferer, use pain relievers like those listed above sparingly (once or twice a week) or not at all. If you're already an overuser (for example, you take more than 10 Excedrin a month), talk to your neurologist about the best way to "kick the habit". You'll likely find that after a month or two your headaches have lessened considerably. Your brain will thank you!

## How Counseling can help with Headaches

By [Deb Del Vecchio-Scully, MS, LPC, NCC](#)

Licensed Professional Counselor and Health & Wellness Coordinator



Living with chronic headaches or migraines can often be challenging -- increasing stress and anxiety for many. Fortunately, there are many ways to enhance quality of life and overall coping with the help of a counselor specializing in non-medication pain methods, often called Behavioral Pain Management (BPM). These techniques use a holistic approach which recognizes that pain can occur in the mind, the body and the emotions. BPM often helps reduce the distress of living with chronic headaches and migraines.

Meditation, relaxation, biofeedback and clinical hypnosis are some of the BPM techniques frequently used in treating pain. They are found to be highly effective in teaching those with headaches to relax, to soothe and increase one's tolerance to pain. Individuals can learn to better identify, prevent and manage the stressors in their life, something we all could benefit from. BPM can also help a headache sufferer identify the "First Noticeable Signs" that a headache is beginning. Because it is much easier to treat headache pain at a lower intensity, identifying these warning signs is crucial to intervene and possibly prevent a headache from escalating. This approach is particularly important for those who do not tolerate headache medications or prefer not to use them. If you are ready to take control of your headaches, we are here to help you.

## Adolescents, Migraines and Headaches

By Deb Del Vecchio-Scully, MS, LPC, NCC  
Health and Wellness Coordinator

Chronic pain and headaches are a significant problem among adolescents, with up to 28 % of children ages 15-19 having migraines. Overall, 75 % of children have had a significant headache by the age 18 and as many as 2-3% suffers with chronic daily headaches. Children and adolescents who suffer from chronic pain and headaches have negative outcomes not only to their physical health, but also to their emotional and spiritual well-being. Therefore, there is an increasing emphasis on teaching adolescents coping skills and combining non-medication approaches with traditional headache treatment to enhance quality of life.

Early intervention is very important and essential in treating migraines and headache pain. Maintaining a diary of headaches, triggers and interventions is a wonderful way to begin identifying the patterns and contributing factors. Many adolescents are coping with enormous school pressures and at times, very high stress as they juggle multiple activities. Often these pressures can create overwhelming stress, escalating headaches in terms of frequency, intensity and duration. Thus, it is vitally important to learn healthy stress prevention and coping skills, obtain adequate rest and sleep, avoid overuse of over the counter medications which can lead to "rebound" headache, avoid high caffeine intake and consume adequate fluids to avoid dehydration , often a headache trigger.



Fortunately, recent studies have found that adolescents with chronic migraine or headache respond very well to psychological tools including relaxation and breathing techniques, clinical hypnosis, biofeedback and counseling to foster headache pain reduction, resilience and improved quality of life.

To learn more, [www.anschealthandwellness.com](http://www.anschealthandwellness.com)

## Acupuncture for Migraine and Headache

By Hanni Heller-Ram, LAc

Licensed Acupuncturist



Migraines and other types of headache; such as tension headache and sinus headache – affect millions of people all over the world. They are painful and debilitating and often reduce sufferer’s quality of life. Acupuncture has been used to relieve Headaches and Migraines, as well as their underlying causes, for thousands of years and is a widely accepted form of treatment for headaches in our society.

According to Chinese medical theory there is a life energy flowing through the body which is termed Qi (pronounced chee). This energy flows through the body on channels known as meridians. Illness arises when the cyclical flow of Qi in the meridians becomes unbalanced, sluggish or even stacks. An acupuncturist is using special sterile needles to stimulate points along those meridians in order to restore optimal energy flow and resolve pain. Your diagnosis and treatment will depend on your individual signs and symptoms, and treatment will be tailored specifically for your individual needs. Acupuncture points to treat headaches are located all over the body; along your legs, arms, shoulders, or head.

The western view is that stimulation of those specific points has the ability to alter various biochemical and physiological conditions in order to achieve the desired effect. For example: Menstrual migraines or hormone related headaches – Acupuncture can assist in regulating many of the women monthly cycle related conditions through its ability to influence levels of FSH and LH and to regulate the communication between the brain and ovaries, to adjust the thyroid glands functions, and to balance the estrogen and progesterone levels.

**Sleep Deficiency and Stress Migraines** – Acupuncture is believed to stimulate the nervous system to release endorphins (pain inhibitors) and serotonin (mood enhancer) which reduce stress including stress induced by sleep deficiency. In addition acupuncture is known to regulate the sleep cycles. Most people report that once overcome the initial anxiety from needle insertion they experience deep relaxation. Moreover, about half fall asleep during the treatment.

**Migraines Triggered by Food and drinks** – In addition to the dietary recommendations given by your physician, the acupuncturist can recommend foods which could support your healing according to your personal conditions and constitution, and as seen from the prospective of oriental medicine.

If you would like more information about the acupuncture services at ANSC, please ask to speak to the Neuropsychology Coordinator, Blanca—203.333.1133, x 152.

## **Migraine Research Studies**

**By Angelo Termine, MSM, MBA  
Clinical Research Manager**

ANSC's Research department has conducted over 100 clinical trials, 30 of them regarding the treatment of migraine. We currently have two migraine studies that are open to enrollment.

The adolescent study is for patients ages 12-18 who suffer from two or more migraines monthly. This is a two visit study, examining the safety and effectiveness of a study medication versus placebo for acute treatment of a migraine.

The second migraine study is for women 18 years or older who have menstrual migraines. This is a six month study to evaluate the safety, tolerability and effectiveness of a study medication versus placebo. This study is expected to start in June. There is no cost to you for participating in these trials and you will be compensated for your time and travel.

To learn more about these studies or other studies please ask your neurologist, visit us online at [www.anscneuro.com](http://www.anscneuro.com) or call our research department at 203-333-1151.

### **Next Issue**

- ◆ Memory Issues
- ◆ Challenges of Care-giving
- ◆ Coping with Stress

### **Associated Neurologists of Southern Connecticut**

75 Kings Highway Cutoff  
Fairfield, CT 06824  
Tel: 203.333.1133  
Fax: 203.333.3937

670 Boston Post Road  
Milford, CT 06460  
Tel: 203.877.1414  
Fax: 203.877.3144



[www.anscneuro.com](http://www.anscneuro.com)