



Chronic Headache Solutions **by Joe Waller, *MPT, Cert. SMT, CMTPT*** Orthopedic & Spine Therapy of Waupaca

When “Jenni” was referred to Orthopedic & Spine Therapy she had been suffering from daily headaches for over 30 years and was not improving with medications. When she learned that many chronic headache conditions are a mix of two or more headache types she became very interested in whether Manual Physical Therapy could benefit her.

Since many headache types share characteristics with migraines, patients are often misdiagnosed. Jenni’s headaches began in her upper neck and would migrate to the back of her skull, forehead and eye. At their worst, the symptoms could disable Jenni for days. She would lock herself in a darkened room and hope for the headaches to subside. She was resigned to a life defined by her headaches.

The ability to reproduce Jenni’s headaches with upper neck muscle palpation, the presence of upper neck and back joint restrictions, and a corresponding loss of neck range of motion indicated that she was suffering from more than chronic migraines.

Jenni’s treatment consisted of manual therapy, muscle stretching, and retraining exercises for neck and postural muscles. By her third visit she was beginning to experience headache free days. One month after beginning PT, she was experiencing only two mild headaches per week and no longer needed medications.

This outcome is not uncommon. Individuals usually show improvement within 1-3 sessions and generally maximize improvement within 9 –12 visits.

The physical therapists at Orthopedic & Spine Therapy have advanced training in the differential diagnosis and Manual Therapy techniques shown to be effective for headaches. If you experience chronic or recurring headaches, have a history of head or neck trauma, or have headaches that don’t significantly improve with medication you can call for a free screening. A physical therapist will evaluate your condition and explain whether Manual Therapy is right for you.

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