

The Effectiveness of Physiotherapy Treatment for Recurrent Headache Associated with Neck Pain: A Narrative Review

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ABSTRACT

Recurrent headaches, particularly tension-type and cervicogenic headaches are often associated with neck pain. Several headache subtypes are tension-type headaches, recurrent headaches, migraine and cluster headaches called chronic daily headache syndromes, cause substantial levels of disability. There is a strong association between recurrent headaches and neck pain, and it is found that 50–75% of individuals with recurrent headaches experience neck pain. A potential source for headache has been identified to be the cervical spine and the studies suggest that anomalies in the cervical vertebra can lead to the formation of headaches. This narrative review aims to examine the effectiveness of physiotherapy treatments for recurrent headaches associated with neck pain, focussing on the mechanisms, intervention strategies, and clinical outcomes, which significantly reduces the frequency as well as the severity of headaches. This review utilised PubMed, Google Scholar, and Cochrane to search for relevant literature and identified 20 studies with the keywords “Recurrent Headaches”, “Neck Pain”,

and “Physiotherapy interventions” from the last 10 years comprising Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT), and systematic review. Out of 20 studies, 10 articles with an average involving 18 to 55 years old subjects, were found to be pertinent to the review. Studies involved in this review found that physiotherapy, involving various kinds of interventions such as therapeutic exercises, electrical stimulation, therapeutic massage, joint mobilisation, or trigger-point therapy is the common nonpharmacological treatment for headaches, used for recurrent headaches for approximately two-week time period. It significantly improves the range of motion, reduces neck muscle tension, and reduces the frequency and severity of headaches. Evidence suggests that cervical manipulations, combined with strengthening and stretching exercises, are effective in improving neck function and decreasing headache severity. These approaches offer a noninvasive and cost-effective alternative to pharmacological treatments.

Keywords: Cervical manipulation, Manual therapy, Tension-type headache.