

# Your Health

# Q & A

Got a niggling health problem? Our team of experts are here each month to advise you on the best alternatives

## SELF HELP FOR HEADACHES

**My husband suffers from frequent headaches, which he thinks originate from his gums or teeth. He takes paracetamol or ibuprofen two to three times a week and I am concerned that this may cause some sort of long term damage elsewhere. He has tried 4head but this does not work in his case. Do you think that a chiropractor could help with this?**

### Harald Gaier advises:

Headache is the ninth most common reason for seeing a GP. One category is referred to as 'tension headache'. This happens when the muscles of your scalp, or the nerves supplying them, trigger the release of lactate, serotonin, bradykinin and prostaglandins, any of which significantly lower your pain threshold. This usually occurs when we're stressed and our 'fight or flee' mechanisms are activated. The unresolved stimulation keeps us in a state of potentially destructive tension.

Yes, the drugs your husband takes routinely could cause damage elsewhere. Ibuprofen may induce gastro-intestinal disorders, like nausea, diarrhoea and ulcerations and/or bleeding from the bowel, whilst paracetamol may induce blood disorders and, after prolonged use or an overdose, pancreatitis, liver and/or kidney damage. Besides, although these drugs may provide some temporary relief, they offer no prospect of a cure.

Surprisingly, the brain itself is almost totally insensitive to pain and it's in the adjacent tissues that the pain is felt. This may even involve the mouth, gums and tooth-sockets. You must remember that it would be practically impossible for your husband to tell whether the pain originates in the gums and teeth or is referred there. Has he had some dental work prior to the onset of the headaches? Should he have an undiagnosed tooth abscess and wants an alternative that avoids x-ray radiation exposure he could have it checked thermographically (non-invasively with an ultra-sensitive infrared camera – see [drgaier.com](http://drgaier.com) for details). Infrared thermography can also detect previously unsuspected toxic or allergenic effects from dental materials. The contortions we often perform involuntarily in the dental chair usually involve the cervical vertebrae



which could later continue to affect the sensory fibres of the first and second cervical nerves, recurrently causing referred pain. If he has had a thyroid or other throat operation, this scenario may also apply. Another often overlooked but common cause of tension headaches is temporomandibular joint dysfunction syndrome. Correction of this can go a long way towards resolving chronic head pain. In such cases a chiropractor could be of very real help to your husband. Manipulative therapy (as used in chiropractic and structural osteopathy) has been shown to be more effective in treating tension headaches than a variety of other therapeutic approaches.

I will also mention a few alternative therapies that have been shown to work in controlled clinical trials. In western phytotherapy, the sedative herbs skullcap and betony are sometimes used in combination for the relief of neuralgic or tension headaches. Also used is feverfew, although no long-term toxicity studies have yet been conducted on it. Another herb, Jesuits' paraguayana or Brazil tea, has been used successfully for stress-induced headaches and headaches associated with fatigue.

Acupuncture has been shown to be significantly more beneficial than orthodox medication over a three-month period. Instead of 4head, your husband could try tiger balm – that Eastern essential oil cure-all – applied topically at the temples. This could provide instant, though short-term, relief. Although effective from five to 15 minutes after application, it ceases to work after about three hours, according to a controlled trial.

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