

Banner: Headache Treatment
Title: The Window of Opportunity

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Cervicogenic headache is a pain referred to the head from a source in the cervical spine. The international headache society recognizes cervicogenic headache as a distinct disorder, since injuries to upper cervical spine joints can cause headache after head trauma or after whiplash. The estimates of prevalence of cervicogenic headaches may be as high as 17% in the general population.

A variety of nerves in the head and neck are involved in head pain conditions. However, the final common pathway is through a prominent nerve with multiple connections called the trigeminal nerve. This nerve, also known as the fifth cranial nerve, provides sensation to virtually most of the head and neck structures. The mechanism underlying the cervicogenic headache involves the connections between cervical and trigeminal nerves. This allows for upper cervical pain to be referred to the head.

Cervicogenic headaches are usually only on one side (unless there is bilateral cervical spine problem) and is aggravated by neck movements and external pressure on the back of the neck. Pain is usually of moderate intensity and is not throbbing. There may be associated symptoms of nausea and vomiting, eye pain, blurring of vision and sensitivity to light and sounds. The pattern and the nature of the connections in the nervous system as described above, creates the window of opportunity, where numbing of the nerves in the cervical spine, may relieve the patient of the head pain condition.

The procedures may range from occipital nerve blocks or a cervical epidural steroid injection to numbing the nerves supplying the joints of the upper cervical spine. The results are usually a dramatic relief from a headache and neck pain condition that was unresponsive to conventional medical therapy for many painful years.

This the fourth in a series of articles geared to increase awareness and understanding of different types of headaches and other chronic painful conditions and the available diagnostic and therapeutic options for each individual disorder. For more information, you may contact Dr. Benjamin Taimoorazy at Guardian Headache and Pain Management Institute, 309-808-1700, www.GuardianPainInstitute.com. This new practice is located at 2203 Eastland Drive, Suite #7, in Bloomington.