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The scent of summer brings thundering headaches for many of us, especially during this stressful period of economic uncertainty. Yes, stress is one of the more common triggers for headaches

Many of my clients complain of headaches when they arrive at my massage centre. With one in 6 Canadians suffering from chronic headaches, taking control of the pain is an absolute. I often begin with a massage prescription, which decreases cortisol, the stress hormone that can tighten muscles, triggering a tension headache. Studies show that simple neck and shoulder massage reduces the number of chronic headaches you suffer from, as well as how long it lasts. Weekly Trager massages decrease medication usage by 44 percent. Even hard-to-treat migraines can get relief from weekly craniosacral massages.

If self-help is more your style, Deborah Engen – a licensed massage therapist who has participated in massage studies at the Mayo Clinic – suggests placing two tennis balls in a sock. Lie on your back on a flat surface and place the sock at the base of your skull with your chin tucked down. Gently massage your temples and slowly breathe in and out, starting the massaging as soon as the pangs begin.

SIWC's Richard Nevin, a registered clinical counsellor, says migraines often begin as specific patterns of tension typically related to past or ongoing traumatic stress. They bind the energy related to incomplete survival responses.

In his practice, Richard guides clients to become aware of prodromal and subtle pre-prodromal symptoms of migraines. With focused tracking of sensation by clients and Richard's observation of physiological responses allows him to work with the earliest indicators of migraines. Instead of a typical fear or stress response to migraine symptoms that produces more tension, clients develop a healthier pattern of responding.

Even yoga has a cure for headaches. Jeannie Stevens from the Yoga Studio, points to face, neck and shoulder tension, which are often a major source of headaches. Through yoga stretches, chronic tension gradually diminishes as circulation and range of movement improve.

Yoga increases the ability to bring attention to each moment, thereby gaining insight into the causes of daily stress (ie too much computer time; morning traffic; arguing). Learning to relax, systematically and regularly, act as an antidote to tension, lessening the frequency of headaches. Learning to "let go" of tension in the mind (meditation) restores our peace and equanimity.

Sit quietly. Bring your attention to your neck and shoulders. With each exhalation allow all of your tension to dissolve like salt dissolving in water.

Dr. Lisa Duong with Plum Blossom Acupuncture & Herbology, knows that chronic headaches and migraines are quite debilitating to those who suffer from them. Acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine are effective methods, with treatments to relax the neck and shoulders being administered. As headaches are caused by upper body muscle tension, the natural release of endorphins during acupuncture can treat stress-induced headaches and migraines, promoting mental and physical relaxation. In women, headaches and migraines may be triggered by cyclical hormonal changes and can greatly benefit from regular treatments.

In July, I'll be discussing healthy children. Send your questions to brittafrombach@gmail.com.

Britta Frombach, Registered Massage Therapist (RMT), is the president of SIWC (Sidney Integrated Wellness Community Society) and owner of Phi Massage Centre in Sidney. To learn more about SIWC members, visit www.siwc.org.