

# Migraine headache therapy shifts treatment focus from the head to the neck

October 26 2016, by Thomas Smith

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Dean Watson. Credit: Murdoch University

A researcher at Murdoch University has investigated a migraine headache therapy which shifts treatment focus from the head to the neck.

PhD graduate Dean Watson studied the effect of neck examination and pain response.

A musculoskeletal physiotherapist, Mr Watson hopes his research will further enhance his headache treatment therapy which examines movement of the top three spinal segments in the neck.

His treatment targets affected nerves which could be responsible for headache and migraine.

Mr Watson says that his method is now practiced in more than 25 countries.

He said: "I have focused on treating the upper neck in headache and migraine conditions since 1991.

"This approach has led to an innovative, manual therapy approach which has provided relief for many patients who have presented with diagnoses which do not support a causal role of disorders of the upper neck."

Researchers have been studying the connection between spinal nerves and headaches for some time.

Mr Watson developed his own treatment method, the Watson Headache Approach, and investigated underlying mechanisms through his PhD research carried out at Murdoch University.

He said: "The vast majority of existing research involved specific, customised technology and the pioneers of this research were based at the Institute of Neurology in London.

"I was advised that Professor Peter Drummond, at Murdoch's School of Psychology and Exercise Science, was Australia's leading authority and most experienced researcher in this area.

"The foundation upon which my approach is based is the reproduction and resolution of usual head pain when examining the top three spinal segments.

"My PhD examined the neurophysiological basis for this clinical phenomenon."

Mr Watson said the underlying disorder in primary headache – migraine

and tension headache – is heightened sensitivity of pain circuits in the brainstem.

He said: "This is the first time a manual cervical intervention has been shown to affect the very core of the migraine process.

"In my final thesis, I presented evidence that showed reproduction and resolution of usual head pain desensitises these circuits."

Mr Watson runs the Watson Headache Clinic in Adelaide, South Australia, offering patients consultation and treatment.

Provided by Murdoch University

Citation: Migraine headache therapy shifts treatment focus from the head to the neck (2016, October 26) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-10-migraine-headache-therapy-shifts-treatment.html>

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