



HEADACHES & MIGRAINES

## How to Bring Headache Patients to Your Door

### 3 STEPS TO HELP ESTABLISH YOURSELF AS THE COMMUNITY EXPERT

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Doctors of chiropractic have the ability to diagnose and treat headaches the minute they graduate. The clinical skills needed to help headache patients are established early. However, the process of reaching out to headache patients is often deficient.

Fortunately, there are activities that if performed diligently, can assist the doctor in reaching headache patients. Add these activities to your practice and establish yourself as the headache expert in your community.

According to the National Board of Chiropractic Examiners 2010 *Practice Analysis of Chiropractic*, the three most common chief complaints doctors of chiropractic encountered in 2003 were low back / pelvic pain (23.6 percent), neck pain (18.7 percent) and headaches / facial pain (12 percent).

Mid-back pain finished fourth in the survey, representing 11.5 percent of all chief complaints. It is probably safe to say that these numbers hold true today, as low back pain, neck pain and headaches have always been known to respond positively to chiropractic care.

Of the most common chief complaints listed here, headaches are the most interesting. Headaches are not a complaint the majority of the general public would expect to be more common than mid-back pain in a chiropractic practice. Some chiropractors may even be surprised by this fact.



Headaches are prevalent in the U.S. and there are many different types. For example, nine out of 10 Americans experience some form of headache at least once per year. Migraine headaches alone affect 29.5 million Americans. Eighty percent of patients who suffer from migraines have a family history of migraines.

These statistics from the [National Headache Foundation](#) bring an opportunity to light - an opportunity for doctors of chiropractic to help larger numbers of headache patients. Now more than ever, all DCs should be reaching out to this patient population more assertively. Here's how to get started.

#### Step #1: Educate Your Practice Staff

Your first job is to educate your staff regarding the origins, diagnosis and treatment of common types of headaches. Providing examples of the headache cases from your practice will help drive the point home. If you are relatively new to private practice, experience gathered during your training will be beneficial.

#### Step #2: Educate Current Patients (Internal Marketing)

Once staff education is complete, education of current patients must be initiated. This is known as internal (within the office) marketing. Internal marketing has two benefits over external marketing (marketing outside the office): 1) It is cheaper; and 2) Members of the target group are established chiropractic patients.

Established patients have already "bought into" the philosophy and benefits of chiropractic care. Understanding chiropractic care for headaches is an easy concept for them to grasp.

Posters, pamphlets and other educational materials should be available in the office for patient education. Some doctors use condition-of-the-week or condition-of-the-month programs to inform

established patients of chiropractic care for a variety of conditions. Bulletin boards and displays are used to draw patients' attention to a featured condition.

You and your staff can use the displays to initiate conversations with the patient in order to discover if they know anyone who suffers from the condition – in this case, headaches. If a patient does know someone suffering from headaches, ask the patient to help inform the person and refer them to your practice.

Testimonies from established patients who have experienced headache relief through chiropractic also serve as excellent educational materials. The testimonies can be posted or distributed as long as [HIPAA privacy rules](#) are followed.

### Step #3: Educate Your Community (External Marketing)

The next step in spreading the word about chiropractic and headaches is external marketing. This has two areas of emphasis: 1) advertising to the general population through various media; and 2) personal contact.

Advertising in newspapers, on television or radio, office websites, the doctor's blog or the Internet in general are powerful options. These media have a broad reach within a community, but are accompanied by more significant costs.

Lunch-and-learn programs for businesses and civic clubs are a must for direct contact with the community. Additionally, many communities have one or more headache support groups that are looking for speakers and help for members. These organizations should be identified and programs scheduled.

Another important aspect of external marketing is the education of other health care providers. General practitioners, neurologists and optometrists see a multitude of headache patients. Contact with these professionals through shared patients is a good starting point. Asking patients to share positive chiropractic experiences with their other doctors is a must.

Lunch-and-learn programs for other providers and their staff, supplying white papers and patient testimonials are also good avenues for establishing direct contact with other providers.

Some health care providers may have a hard time wrapping their heads around chiropractic care for headaches, especially headaches they have always viewed as neurological conditions not affiliated with the spine.

With this as a possibility, begin the educational process by discussing [cervicogenic headaches](#). Since cervicogenic headaches are directly related to the spine, it will be easier to begin establishing a basis for chiropractic care for headaches. Once headway is made in this area, it will serve as the foundation for further education.

The potential to provide relief for a larger number of headache patients exists, but that potential can only be realized by doctors of chiropractic and their staff members who rise to the challenge of getting the word out about chiropractic care for headaches. Are you ready?