



CHAPTER 1

SOLUTIONS FOR THE STORM

Headache pain may be likened to an approaching thunderstorm. The atmospheric conditions change, the sunny sky turns to gray, and the billowing, dark clouds and lightning advance over the horizon until the thunderstorm engulfs the person in waves of pain. The headache pain seems inescapable and a simple position change will not help the problem. When a headache episode hits, the temptation to use excessive medication can be overwhelming. Unfortunately, most of the millions of people enduring these headache storms have no idea

that relief is at their fingertips. The purpose of this book is to provide a collection of self-help techniques that can be used to rapidly calm this headache storm.

Headaches are an extremely frustrating problem because they do not always have an obvious cause. Whereas someone with arthritis in the knee may stop running to prevent further knee damage, or the person with a shoulder rotator cuff injury may stay clear of overhead activities to avoid aggravating the shoulder pain. The triggers for headaches are not always as clear cut.

Headaches can be equally frustrating for the medical professional. Medication can help reduce headache frequency and severity, but therapeutic dosages can be difficult to fine tune, and the side effects need to be considered. After working with people with headaches for decades, I have found that there are techniques to treat headaches just as effectively as one would treat any orthopedic condition.

People are often surprised to feel their headaches fade in just several minutes with natural physical methods, without the need to run to the medication cabinet. Many people who are referred to physical therapy for their headaches later tell me, after their headache symptoms have been relieved, “I really did not know why my doctor referred me to physical therapy for my headaches. I did not understand what physical therapy could do for my headaches.” In reality, physical therapy can do quite a bit.

My doctorate in physical therapy from Arcadia University and my two physical therapy orthopedic certifications have provided me with a solid foundation to help those suffering from headaches. Some of the treatment options are buried deep within research papers an average person would have little chance of finding. Many of the headache treatment methods pictured in this book have been used for decades but are not widely known. Other headache reduction strategies are presented here for the first time, such as certain acupressure points, theraband exercises, muscle firing correction and specific stretches to

the headache-generating muscles. Many people are lifelong headache sufferers and do not believe there will ever be an end in sight, but the truth is, the answers are literally at their fingertips.

There are three types of headaches that respond particularly well to acupressure and physical therapy techniques. It is important to understand what type of headache you have, so that you can select the appropriate treatment for your individual headache. Tight muscles and joints in the neck are one type of headache that can be successfully treated. Tension headaches are another type of headache that come from a mixture of mental and muscular stress. Migraines are the most debilitating of these headaches and are triggered when bodily systems are thrown out of balance.

Three of the chapters provide treatments that target each of these headache types. Many people have “mixed” headaches, with more than one type of headache going on at the same time. As you develop your own personalized headache management program, you may find your best treatments are blended from several of the treatment chapters. While you may still be predisposed to getting headaches, you can use techniques to prevent the headache cycle from starting, thereby “calming the headache storm.”

There is a unique chapter on acupressure that diagrams the points which I have found most useful for headache relief over the last three decades. For instance, one point is very useful for decreasing the light sensitivity that many headache sufferers have, while other specific points are useful in relieving headache-associated nausea and sinus headache pressure. People are frequently astounded when a pressure point in an arm or leg relieves pressure in their neck or head in less than a minute. Acupressure points are a useful “first aid” treatment to reduce a developing headache before it escalates in severity.

The success of acupressure point treatment depends on how the pressure is applied in terms of the strength, duration, and angle of the

pressure. Acupuncture needles bring another type of stimulation to bear on the headache problem. It is important to realize that your headache might be best treated by not just one point, but rather a combination of points. You may benefit from seeking out the expertise of an acupuncturist, who can determine the best points for your individual headache problem. Once you know your points, you can easily use them at home.

Before trying a specific physical therapy treatment, there is a detective process that people need to go through to get the best result from their headache management program. The final chapter illustrates how you can develop a plan of action. This chapter shows how a person can put the various strategies together to obtain lasting headache relief, highlighting a 28-year-old woman who had suffered headaches for 11 long years. Physical therapy techniques rapidly freed her from the headaches that had interfered with her life. Her relief continued even when rechecked 25 months later.

In most cases, headaches can be relieved with self-help techniques. The tragedy is that millions of people do not realize how close at hand relief can be. Just about every headache sufferer will find strategies in this manual that can be used to make the headache storm a little less threatening.