

# Wicked Headache

who gets better and why

bruce p. abbott m.d.

## COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

Copyright © 2009 by [Bruce P. Abbott M.D.. All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.No parts of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission of the copyright owner.

The author and publisher have used their best efforts in preparing this book and the instructions contained herein. However, the author and the publisher make no warranties of any kind, express or implied, with the regard of the information contained in this book, and specially disclaim, without limitation, any implied warranties of merchantability and fitness for any particular purpose.

## NOTICE OF LIABILITY

In no event shall the author or the publisher be responsible or liable for any loss of profits or other commercial or personal damages, including but not limited to special incidental, consequential, or any other damages, in connection with or arising out of furnishing, performance or use of this book.

## TRADEMARKS

Throughout this book, trademarks are used. Rather than put a trademark symbol in every occurrence of a trademarked name, we state that we are using the names in an editorial fashion only and to the benefit of the trademark owner with no intention of infringement of the trademarks.

Thus, copyrights on individual photographic, trademarks and clip art images reproduced in this book are retained by the respective owner.

## PUBLISHING INFORMATION

First published in the United States in July 2009 and distributed via wickedheadache.com

Designed with OpenOffice Writer – an open source office suite program by Sun Microsystems.

Template created by Lela Iskandar Suhaimi from <http://www.EbookTemplates.org>

This ebook is dedicated to my patients  
in the hope that their treatment has in  
some way alleviated their pain.

---

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

**Wicked Headache.....5**  
*Multiple Problems*

*Interconnectivity Of Headaches*  
*Social Stigma*  
*Medication And Side Effects*

INTRODUCTION

# Wicked Headache

## Who Gets Better and Why

**W**icked headache can engulf you like an ocean storm. It takes hold and drags down your body, mind and spirit.

an anonymous patient

Headache, while often debilitating is seldom life threatening. Yet, it causes major disruption in the lives of those who suffer under its spell. And unlike life threatening diseases such as cancer or diabetes chronic headache sufferers or as one of my patients calls them

"wicked headache sufferers", are at a different disadvantage. Wicked headache as an illness often lacks the social acceptability of these other conditions. Talk to anyone who is a chronic headache sufferer and you will find the disability can be beyond belief. Serious disruption to family life, social interactions and the ability to hold a demanding job or in some cases any job are routine.

My experience in treating a number of headache patients over the years, many successfully but some less so, has turned up a set of "sticking points" or issues. Most headache patients who get better have effectively dealt with these points. Patients who don't improve are unable or unwilling to deal with them. Some of these points may seem provocative, annoying or unfair.

However they are very real.

## Multiple Problems

Wicked headache sufferers usually experience more than one headache type.

Multiple things are wrong and effective treatment must

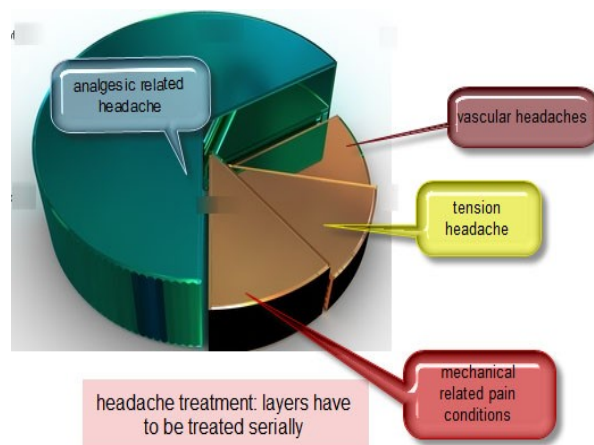
**SECTION HIGHLIGHT**

- more than one type of headache experienced
- treatment must be serial
- each headache type requires its own treatment protocol.

involve removing or reducing more than one cause of the headaches. It is analogous to stones in one's shoe; if only one stone is removed, the walker will still hobble. All of the stones have to be removed in order to walk freely. Similarly, the headache treatment plan needs to lay out a sequence of actions that will remedy the multiple problems involved. Usually one headache type at a time.

Each headache type requires its own individual treatment approach. This takes time, patience, effort and a willingness on the part of the patient to actively participate in the treatment effort.

The treatment plan needs to be based on a comprehensive assessment of headache conditions. Multiple headaches require an analysis of multiple types of headache possibilities. See diagram below.



Often, the individual has analgesic rebound headache among their assortment of headache types. Caused by excessive use of analgesics or pain relievers, no treatment can proceed until the analgesic headache problem is resolved.

The general well being of wicked headache sufferers is often of lower quality than non-headache sufferers and their sleep quality is often poor, accompanied by low energy and mood disorder.

When a patient has chronic headache syndrome, that is pain lasting 2 to 3 or more weeks certain brain chemicals become depleted. These chemicals, one of which is serotonin, must be restored in order to treat the chronic pain.

And unlike many other illnesses there is no set of clinical tests that can be used to diagnose the patient.

These factors make diagnosing and treating a chronic headache sufferer a difficult process.

## Interconnectivity Of Headaches

It is often the case that one kind of headache contributes to the onset of another type of headache. That is why it is important to separate the different

pain components. Vascular, tension or neuralgia type headaches are frequently at play. For some, tension headache is a "trigger" that brings on a vascular headache episode. Often, there is a "bi-directionality" to the headache conditions.

Sorting out various headache types is a time consuming business. Since the patient will still experience headaches during this period there may be a tendency to become disillusioned that any progress is being made and abandon the treatment that has been prescribed.

And due to other contributing factors such as mood disorders or sleep disturbances the unravelling of the headache complex can be a lengthy effort.

## Social Stigma

There is a social stigma to being a chronic headache sufferer and taking headache medicine. Medicines for heart disease or diabetes are examples of socially acceptable medicines. Society understands that our body becomes ill and medicine for these types of illness is required. There seems to be considerably less support and understanding for the chronic headache sufferer. Missing work or a major social event for reasons of a headache often fail to pass the social acceptance test. Headache pain is real. And it can be excruciating, denying the sufferer the opportunity to function in a normal manner and perform routine daily activities.

**“ Headche  
pain is  
real ...and it  
can be excruciating.**

### A Key Ingredient: Family Support

Missed social events, days away from work and inability to perform family chores can place a significant burden and strain on a family. For the headache sufferer who is in the midst of a severe headache "storm" simple acts become unbearably difficult.

I have found that successfully treated patients often involve a family member in their diagnosis and treatment process. Involvement of a support person who can assist the a patient in dealing with headache can go a long way. Support individuals can:

1. Prompt the patient to take medications
2. Help the patient complete therapeutic exercises
3. Help the patient maintain a schedule

4. Assist the patient in accurately tracking headache episodes

And family members can help reduce the sense of "social stigma" attached to headache by demonstrating their understanding of what the patient is experiencing and explaining to friends, co-workers and others that headache is a real and debilitating illness.

For many chronic sufferers adhering as close as possible to a fixed schedule, engaging in regular exercise and participating in outside events can be important in maintaining a headache free period. Encouragement from family members is important in helping the patient to normalize his or her routine.

## Medication And Side Effects

**“ “ The test is not whether it is natural or synthetic but whether it is safe and effective.**

Experience has taught me that among those who don't get better is a belief is that side effects is a reason not to take medications. The contraindication list can be lengthy and given all the possible side effects such

patients see it as sensible not to take their headache medications as prescribed.

However, the issue is not the general issue of side effects but the specific question of whether or not potential side effects of a given medication will affect you or not. Not whether they will affect someone else. A particular medication may have side effect for another individual but be well tolerated by your system. If not, your doctor can usually prescribe an alternative medication that will work toward the same therapeutic goal with fewer or no side effects.

### Natural Substances

Another assumption is that there should be a natural substance that one can successfully take and thereby avoid pharmaceutical treatment. Furthermore, there is a belief that medical doctors are suspicious of and not supportive of natural or alternative treatments. Medical doctors are trained to be evidence based. For the most part they are not "anti-natural" if there is strong clinical evidence of the efficacy of the treatment.

#### SECTION HIGHLIGHT

- natural and synthetic substances
- doctors are trained to be evidenced based

The test is not whether it is "natural" or "synthetic." The test is whether it is safe and effective.

Natural substances have not gone through the same rigorous studies as pharmaceutical medicines. Putting an alternative substance into your body, a substance that has not been well researched and tested places you at risk. The alternative substance may confound other prescribed medications and abort their therapeutic effect.

In Part II I will discuss the "Cycle of Pain" and how this cycle must be dealt with before real progress in headache treatment can be made.

More information about headache including an on-line assessment can be found at <http://www.wickedheadche.com>