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VOL. 10 NO. 4 \$4.95
OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2017
DISPLAY UNTIL NOVEMBER 30, 2017
PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 41578041

FEEL-GOOD FITNESS

Say goodbye to tension headaches

Reduce your painful headaches with these tips and stretches.

BY DRS. PAOLO AND MARCO DE CIANTIS

Most people will experience a headache in their lifetime, whether it is caused by pain, stress, allergies or underlying pathology. Believe it or not, there are various types of headaches distributed over many classes with many causes. One of the most common types of headache is the tension-type headache.

Tension headaches are generally characterized as a painful "tension," commonly in a band-like distribution across the forehead or temple region (one or both sides of the head). Tension headaches often arise when muscles in the face, mouth, neck or shoulders are held in a static (i.e. no movement) position for long periods of time. Over time, the muscles become too tense and begin generating pain. This painful sensation gets sent (via a process known as "referred pain" or "referral pattern") to the head region resulting in a headache. This often occurs in office workers who

have a slouchy posture while at their desk for hours at a time.

The good news is that tension headaches can be treated with two simple stretches and moderate postural modifications, focusing on tension-type headaches that originate from the neck/shoulders.

1. The first stretch addresses tight muscles in the neck/shoulder area: the "ear to shoulder" stretch. Gently bring one ear to the shoulder of the same side until you feel a comfortable stretch on the opposite side of the neck and upper shoulder. It is very important that your nose remains pointing forward at all times. After a five second hold, repeat the stretch on the opposite side and repeat three sets of 10 each day.
2. The second stretch is the "armpit smell" stretch. This funny looking stretch is performed by bringing your chin to your chest then turning your head to point your nose into one armpit. After a five second hold,

bring your chin back to your chest and repeat on the opposite side. Perform three sets of 10 each day.

For headaches, we also recommend that patients make a "headache journal." This can be done on a tablet, cell phone or in writing. The idea is to jot down any relevant information regarding your activities, food consumed, ambient lighting or sound that occurred around the time of your headache. After a week or so, read your journal. Often, patterns will emerge and individuals will be able to identify their headache triggers and avoid them to reduce the frequency and intensity of their headaches. 2

Drs. Marco and Paolo De Ciantis are Toronto-based chiropractic doctors and co-owners of Sports Specialist Rehab Centre. The identical twins specialize in pain and injury prevention, working with a range of patients from athletes looking to improve their performance to individuals who simply want day-to-day tasks to be easier, in an effort to restore optimal well-being.