

Cervicogenic Headache

[Wellness Chinese Medicine – Dr. Cao Yafei](#)

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Headache is extremely common and one of the most frequent complaints in outpatient clinics. However, it is also a complex condition, and in many cases, the exact cause remains unclear. Among the many types of headaches, one type stems from cervical spine disorders and is called **cervicogenic headache**.

Due to its symptoms manifesting in the head while the root cause lies in the cervical spine, cervicogenic headache often has a "misleading" nature. This can result in delayed recognition, misdiagnosis, and mistreatment.

What is Cervicogenic Headache?

Cervicogenic headache is a clinical syndrome characterized by headaches primarily caused by cervical spine disorders. The pain is typically located in the **occipital region** (back of the head) and often accompanied by neck pain, dizziness, and other symptoms associated with cervical spine issues.

Why Does Cervical Spine Disease Cause Headaches?

The cervical spine is connected to the head via the first to fourth cervical nerves, which together form the **greater occipital nerve**, **lesser occipital nerve**, and **greater auricular nerve**. These nerves transmit sensations from the occipital, parietal, and temporal regions of the head.

When cervical spine issues compress or irritate these nerves, it can result in pain in the occipital, parietal, or temporal regions. Additionally, some neck muscles originate

at the occipital bone, meaning disorders of cervical facet joints or muscle injuries can also radiate pain to the head.

Key Characteristics of Cervicogenic Headache

Location: Pain is typically found in the occipital, parietal, or temporal regions of the head.

Trigger: Headache is often triggered or exacerbated by neck movement or strain.

Differential Diagnosis

It is crucial to recognize that headaches can arise from many causes. Diagnosing cervicogenic headache requires ruling out other potential sources, such as: Eye disorders, Ear, nose, or sinus conditions, Intracranial diseases

Since the symptoms of cervicogenic headache can closely resemble those of other conditions, differentiation is challenging and requires the expertise of experienced specialists.

Treatment

Once cervicogenic headache is diagnosed, treatment should focus on the underlying cervical spine disorder. The goal is to: Alleviate local soft tissue inflammation, Reduce nerve compression caused by intervertebral discs, Relieve headache symptoms.

Primary Treatment Methods

Non-surgical treatments are the mainstay and often yield effective results. These may include: **Acupuncture, Manual therapy and massage, Traditional Chinese medicine** (e.g., herbal remedies).

With appropriate treatment, cervicogenic headache symptoms can be effectively managed, significantly improving patients' quality of life.