

**NAT Pro Series:**

# **Fusion Massage for Tension Headaches**

Course Notes

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# **Tension Headaches, Sinus Drainage and Massage**

## **Background to the Condition**

Tension headaches are the most common type of headache, they are experienced by most people during their lives and they are the 'everyday' headaches. Tension headaches used to be referred to as muscle contraction headaches or stress headaches, but generally these terms have gone out of usage.

The National Health Service in the UK estimate that about half of adults experience tension-type headaches once or twice a month, with 1 in 3 get suffering up to 15 times a month.

Up to 80 percent of the adult population in the United States suffers from occasional tension-type headaches. Chronic daily tension-type headaches affect approximately 3% of the population with women being twice as likely to suffer from them as men.

Tension headaches are known as primary headaches meaning that there is no known underlying cause. A tension headache may feel like a tight band around the head or a weight on top of the head. The headache can be one sided but it is more usual for it to be on both sides of your head. The tension may spread down the neck and shoulders or feel like it's coming up from the neck and shoulders, and there is often a pain or sensation of pressure behind the eyes. A tension-type headache can last anything from 30 minutes to 7 days but most will last a few hours.

Muscle tension in the face, neck and shoulders can cause tension headaches. Spending all day squinting at a computer screen or frowning will make the muscles around the forehead tense and someone may do this for many hours at a time, this can then result in a tension headache.

## **Anatomy, Physiology and Pathology**

Please study the diagram below. It takes 11 different muscles to frown. That is 11 muscles under pressure, if this occurs for a prolonged period of time, then that tension has to go somewhere.

Here are the 11 muscles;

2 Orbicularis oculi muscles which causes the eye to crinkle.

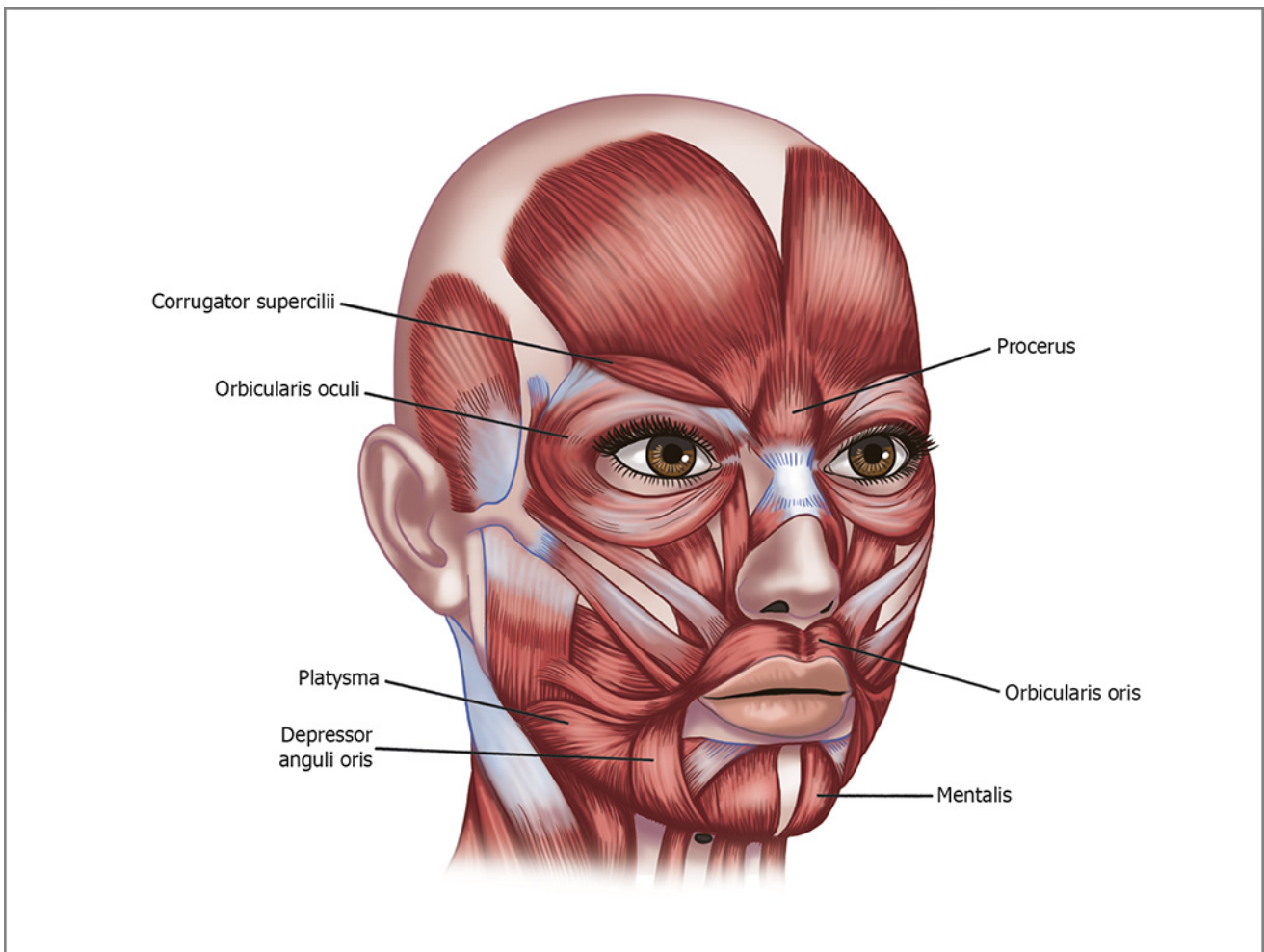
2 Platysma which pull down the lips/mouth and wrinkles the skin on portions of the lower face.

3 Corrugator supercilii and procerus muscles which furrows the brow.

1 Orbicularis oris to close the mouth and puckers the lips.

1 Mentalis, the muscle that causes a wrinkling of the chin. Known as the 'pouting' muscle.

2 Depressor anguli oris, the muscles that pull corner of mouth down.



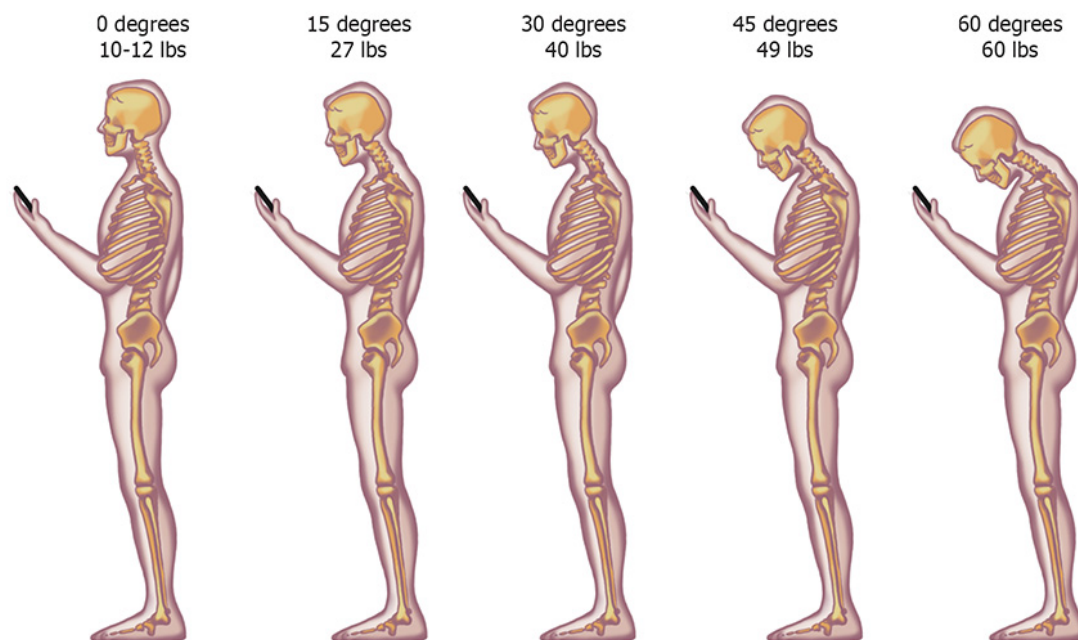
### Task 1:

Spend 10 minutes with your notes and mirror and try to isolate each muscle and its function with your own face – doing this will give you a strong understanding of how these muscles will work and the energy it takes to use them.

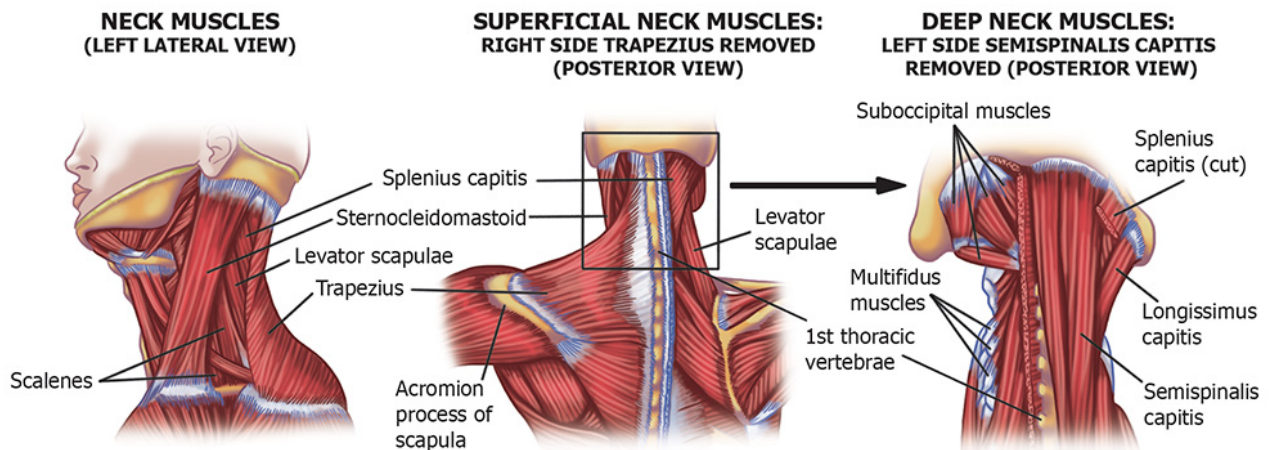
Let's take a few minutes to revise our knowledge of the muscular and connective tissue structure of the head, neck and shoulders.

## Task 2:

Self-analysis. We know how powerful the muscles of the head and neck are. Having poor posture as we work, read, how we are on our phones with our heads down adds an incredible pressure to our neck and shoulders. Study the image below and try to be aware of how you hold your own phone and how your own posture is – you could be adding 60lb of extra pressure to your spine and musculature! That's the same as 48 basket balls or 4-5 bowling balls!



Task 3: The connections between the head, neck and shoulders are complex, revise your knowledge of them with the diagrams below. It is worth taking a few minutes to locate these muscles on yourself or on a friend as this will help with your revision.



You can see from the detail in the diagram that if you are working with your head tilted forward for long periods, you are putting stress onto your neck and shoulder muscles, this will affect both the superficial and deep muscles and it can give a whole host of problems from neck and shoulder pain and tension, including tension headaches.

Muscles don't work in isolation – if you are holding your phone, driving, using the computer – then you are also extending your arm and hand muscles – so when we come to the treatment part of this course – we will treat holistically looking at all of the interactions between the muscles. One tight muscle doesn't just mean pain or tension in that muscle – it can have a ripple effect throughout the whole body.

## Treating Tension Headaches

While tension headaches do respond well to over the counter painkillers, taking these on a regular basis can lead to medication-overuse headaches. If painkillers are taken on a daily or almost daily basis to treat a run of tension headaches, stopping the painkillers will cause physical withdrawal symptoms, the primary symptom of which will be headaches. These withdrawal symptoms will last on average two weeks but the longer term benefits of not using the painkillers are worth the relatively short term withdrawal. If strong painkillers have been used for a long period of term this withdrawal should be under medical supervision.

Other triggers for tension headaches:

- stress and anxiety
- squinting at papers or computer screens
- poor posture
- lack of sleep and tiredness
- not drinking enough water or fluids resulting in dehydration
- low blood sugar from missing meals
- bright sunlight
- not moving around enough allowing muscles to tighten
- changes in the weather
- having hair tied up too tight
- being exposed to too much noise or to noises at a certain frequency or
- certain smells.

Avoiding all of these triggers is very difficult for most people working and living in a public space, but knowing individual triggers can help manage headaches and deal with them more quickly when they do occur.

Exercise, relaxation and hydration are all helpful in treating tension headaches along with taking a break from the computer, ensuring that blood sugar doesn't get too low, relaxing hair ties and wearing correct glasses but there are also some very useful massage techniques that will help to alleviate a tension headache once it starts.

One of the side effects of this massage treatment is that it can also make your client look younger! It can relax the muscles that cause frown lines and wrinkles – so if you can help with your client with their headaches and send them out looking younger – that has to be a bonus!



## Sinus Drainage

The sinuses are a connected system of hollow cavities in the skull. The cheekbones hold the maxillary sinuses (the largest at about 1" across). The frontal sinuses are located between the eye-brows. The ethmoid sinuses are between the eyes and in the bones behind the nose are the sphenoid sinuses. Sinuses are lined with soft, pink tissue called mucosa and all they usually contain are a thin layer of mucus.

Most of the sinuses drain into the nose through a small channel or drainage pathway known as the middle meatus. The sinuses have a number of functions:

- they lighten the skull as the bone here is much less dense than elsewhere in the head.
- they improve our voices by improving its resonance, and
- they produce a mucus that moisturizes the inside of the nose which helps protect the body from dust, allergens, and pollutants.

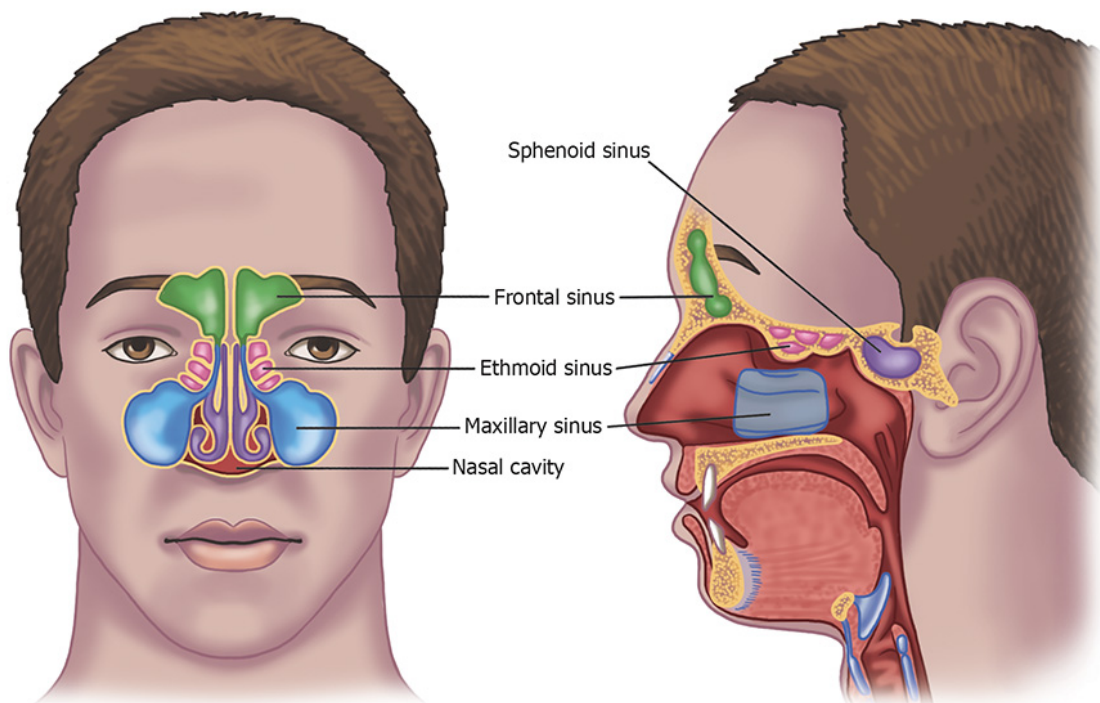
The sinuses can however also cause problems. Common ones include:

1. Blockages. Within each sinus is an ostium, which is an opening that's responsible for drainage. If this gets blocked then mucus backs up and everything gets clogged up.
2. Some people will have a deviated nasal septum. The nasal septum is the thin wall of bone and cartilage inside your nasal cavity that separates your two nasal passages. Ideally, it's in the middle of the nose, giving two equal sides, but either from genetics or (often sports) injury, it's off centre making one side smaller than the other and this can cause sinus issues – and snoring.
3. Allergies or chemical sensitivities give rise to some sinus problems and
4. The best massage in the world is not going to correct a deviated nasal septum or change a physical bone structure we were born with – but it can help give some temporary relief

from blocked sinuses, for some people it will even give longer term relief.

This massage that we are going to do for tension headaches – also works most of the points that we need to work for sinus drainage massage – so you can follow all of the techniques given here. You don't necessarily need the warm up work or the shoulder work, you can jump straight in at the face and head massage. One additional gentle technique to add at the end of the massage, after you have done everything else on the face and head which can assist more. Just doing that one technique on its own isn't as effective as doing the whole head and face work, but that doesn't mean it needs to be a long treatment.

Please refresh your Anatomy and Physiology knowledge with the diagram of the sinuses below and again take a minute to find these areas on yourself.



## Specific contraindications

As with all massage, we need to look at contraindications before we look at treatment.

1. If someone is experiencing tension-type headaches more than 15 times a month for at least three months in a row, this is known as chronic tension headaches. While most people can manage the occasional headache, chronic tension headaches become more debilitating and can have a significant negative impact on life. If headaches are severe or if there is a significant increase in the number of headaches then it is worth considering a visit to a health care practitioner to rule out any underlying cause.
2. If headaches are accompanied by a very stiff neck, fever, nausea, vomiting and confusion or come on following an accident, especially involving a blow to the head or if they are accompanied by weakness, numbness, slurred speech or confusion then do not massage and emergency medical help should be sought as there could be an underlying condition which needs urgent medical attention.
3. If the headache is just around one eye and is very intense, it is more likely to be a cluster headache and they need to go and see their medical practitioner for diagnosis and treatment.
4. If someone has had a stroke or transient ischemic attack (TIA) in the last 3 months then ANY massage work to the neck has to be avoided, there is an increased and real risk of another stroke or TIA – so massage around the neck area is completely contraindicated. The client should get their doctor's consent for even the gentlest of head and face massage.
5. If you know that your client has atherosclerosis, or hardening of the arteries, avoid the neck work as you want to avoid potentially causing a problem with the carotid arteries.
6. If someone has a neck or head injury then you should not massage.
7. If someone has just had dental work, particularly root canal work, or has dentures, then you need to avoid the jaw part of this treatment.

8. If your client has a cold, sinusitis or other infection then you should wait until that has passed before you work on them or you could make it worse for them – and catch it yourself.

## **Massage Treatments**

If you have a longer treatment time, you will get more effective results by working the whole of the upper body, starting with that very detailed hand work – if this isn't something that is part of your modality then there is a short training course as part of this series where you will be able to pick up that skill and knowledge – you will find that if you do this that you get a longer lasting and more effective treatment and you will get a quicker and deeper release when you come to work on the neck and shoulders.

Sometimes of course you might only have a shorter time to do the treatment or you might be working in a corporate environment where your client doesn't want to, or cannot, undress. So this treatment here will focus specifically on the head and neck with a small amount of work on the shoulders as a specific treatment for tension headaches – but if you can – incorporate it into an upper body treatment of your own modality.

If you are working in a cold climate consider using a heated table or electric blanket underneath the client will help their muscles to relax. Dimmed lighting will help the client relax. You can also so these treatments as a form of massage 'first aid' for a friend or colleague who is suffering, needs some quick relief for their tension headaches and you can adapt these techniques to suit any environment.

Another thing worth considering if you are working in a cold climate, heated eye masks are also available and these can be effective, they are not expensive and it's something that your client can use at home and they are readily available online.

For the next techniques – you can do them in any order and you can keep repeating them for as long as you have. You will find some techniques work better for some clients than others – that will depend where they are holding their tension as we all hold it slightly differently, so mix and match these techniques as you work and try not to get stuck in a rut by always doing the same thing the same way.

1. Shoulder warm up – we are going to show this two ways, first dressed where we are working through the clothing, and then skin to skin. Please refer to the video content for this or you can simply use your usual shoulder and upper back work from your own modality.
2. If your client is face up, or when they first turn over after warm up shoulder and upper back work – or after the longer treatment on the upper body we've already discussed – then you work on gently relaxing the eyes. This can be very effective and is also something that can be self-administered. Cup your hands gently over the eyes (without resting on the actual eyes) and hold for a minute or two, you may find that the client's vision is a little blurry immediately afterwards, warn them that this is normal as the eye muscles have relaxed, it will quickly return to normal. At the same time, encourage your client to focus on their breathing so that their breathing is relaxed but deep.
3. Eyebrow release. Place one finger at the centre of the eyebrows and without losing contact with the skin move your finger in small circles, repeat 6 or 7 times and then move along the eyebrow half a finger width so that each time you move you are covering half a new area, and half where your finger has just been. Work your way all along both eyebrows simultaneously. Again, this is a technique that can be self-administered, even in a work setting.
4. Forehead release. Holding your fingers together so that they form a solid line, or using the flat of a finger, place them in the centre of the forehead with your little finger close to the eyebrows and your index finger close to the hairline. Move along the forehead a finger width at a time so that each time you move you are covering half a new area Work your way all along both sides of the forehead simultaneously until you reach the temples, don't put any pressure on the temples. You can also work the same area with a little oil or lotion stroking outwards – you should be using enough pressure to gently move the skin, almost as if you are ironing the forehead with your fingers.
5. Pressing down a little, pull your fingers outwards releasing the pressure as you get towards the temple. If you have dry skin or are working on a more elderly client, use a little

massage oil or moisturiser so that you don't drag the skin. Repeat this move 5 or 6 times.

6. Scalp massage – circle. Placing your fingers about 1cm apart and just above the temples, press just enough to have a firm contact with the skin of the scalp and move your fingers in small circles without losing contact with the skin. Move in both directions so that you are freeing the tiny muscles around the head and work backwards from this position so that you cover the whole of the scalp.

7. Scalp massage – centre line release. Next, place your thumbs along the midline of the head, starting at the hairline and press for the count of 3, release and move your thumbs down the head for as far back on the head as you can comfortably reach.

8. If your client has long hair then you can also pull the hair to help release the scalp, done well this feels like your scalp can breathe, done badly it will take your client back to the school yard. It is important to grasp a good amount of hair, 2-3cm worth between your fingers and pull straight out. Make sure that you are not pulling one area more than another or this will hurt and do make sure that you pull with equal pressure on both sides of the head at the same time. Get feedback from your client, if they don't report something along the lines of it being 'wonderful' stop and practice on yourself first. If this is good for your client, work all the way around their head with this technique.

9. Jaw line work. This area can be a very one tender one to work, particularly if your client grinds or grits their teeth. Work all the way up the jawline from the centre of the chin to the jaw joint Ask the client to relax their jaw and let it fall open a little.

10. Deeper jaw release. Place your three middle fingers at the jaw joint (you can find this by asking the client to open and close their mouth) and without moving your fingers off the contact point they have with the skin (so that you are moving the skin and not just moving around on top of it), make small circles with your fingers to help to release the jaw tension. If this area is particularly tight you can also press and hold just in front of the jaw joint, with a slightly slack jaw, feel for the front

of the joint and working with your client's breath (working deeper on the out-breath) press and hold this point for the count of 3. Let your client know before you do this – it might be uncomfortable for your client but it shouldn't hurt – so check in on the depth with your client.

11. Neck work. While you can do the head and face massage in any order, aim to keep this neck work for towards the end of the treatment so that you have loosened up other areas that will feed into this treatment too. We are doing this neck work with the client facing upwards and again you can simply use your usual techniques here – please refer to the video material to show the techniques used in this treatment. Remember we are focusing on releasing the back and sides of the neck, we are not going into the throat area.

12. Sinus drainage points. This is the last part of the treatment to do for someone with sinus issues – remember all of the other, particularly facial techniques, add to this to make a whole treatment. You are working on the points between the eyebrows, at the corner of the eye and on the bridge of the nose as shown in the training video. Simply press, hold for the count of 2 or 3 and release, work your way down the face and repeat this 5 or 6 times. Then, using the flat of your curled little finger (see video) move across the cheeks a finger width at a time so that each time you move you are covering a new area. Work your way all across both cheeks simultaneously until you reach the ears. Repeat 3 times. If the client's skin is dry or they are more elderly then use a little lotion so that you don't drag the skin.

13. Aim to finish the treatment by returning to the eyebrows and forehead for a soothing conclusion to the massage session, you can make gentle strokes over the procerus muscle – this might also help with the face lifting effect of the treatment – and it will complete the relaxation of the session. Allow your client to relax for a few minutes and ensure that they have plenty of water to drink for the rest of the day.



These are all techniques that can be self administered as headache 'first aid' in a work setting. The following massage processes are for prevention between headaches or for a fuller treatment during headaches. As long as the headache is not accompanied by other symptoms these can be carried out while the client has a headache to give a deeper level of relief.

