



A MEDICAL SPECIALIST

Meet this Local Headache Expert

Headaches can be the punch line of jokes or a flippant excuse in conversation. However to the person suffering from a headache, there is nothing humorous or simple about them. After years of dismissing pain as "just getting old", "that time of the month" or some other cliché, doctors are getting serious about the issues of pain including headache pain.

"Pain is now considered the fifth vital sign," notes Dr. Nesreen N. Suwan, an area doctor who is board certified in neurology, electro diagnostic medicine and pain medicine. She also had completed advanced certification in the area of pain medicine. Traditionally, doctors assessing patients' conditions used temperature, pulse, respiration and blood pressure readings. But today a patient's pain level is also taken into consideration.

Treating pain is not simply a matter of administering drugs to mask the discomfort. "It is important to find where the pain is coming from and then treat it," says Dr. Suwan. "Sometimes we can't cure the cause of the pain but other times we can. It is important to both treat the pain and find the source of the pain."

Sometimes the pain is coming from an unexpected place. Dr. Suwan relates her experience with a patient having a pain in her leg. After completing tests, it was discovered that the woman had an ovarian tumor pinching nerves in her lower back which caused her the leg pain. By removing the tumor, the pain was relieved. "Pain is a symptom, not a disease," notes Dr. Suwan. By finding the cause, the pain can often be stopped or more effectively controlled.

"A person should not feel he has to learn to live with pain," says Dr. Suwan. She finds that many patients come to her for headache pains that seem uncontrollable. "Headaches are a science all by themselves," she says. "A headache can be a sign of an underlying condition or can be a disease all by itself. The key is to find the source."

Dr. Suwan has expertise in many ways to find the causes of arm, neck, back and leg pain including electro-diagnostic methods. By measuring the electrical activity of muscles and nerves, she is able to see possible sources of pain.

"There are at least a hundred types of headaches," says Dr. Suwan. To dismiss frequent headaches as sinus headaches or tension headaches is overlooking the possibility of numerous other causes for the pain. Headaches can be caused by infection, pressure in the brain, neck problems, pinched nerves and many other conditions.

"Where is my headache coming from?" is the first question Dr. Suwan tries to answer. Once she can identify the source, she can prescribe effective treatment. "The treatment of a headache is an art," she explains. She begins by educating her patient about the cause of the headache. She then treats the headache pain with innovative techniques. Some headaches can be controlled with medications while others respond to more unusual treatments like acupuncture and Botox injections. Botox treatment for migraines was discovered accidentally. People receiving Botox for cosmetic reasons experienced headache relief. Doctors then began to research its effectiveness for treating migraines.

Patients who do not respond to other treatments could be candidates for electrical stimulation. This implanted device uses electrical impulses to block the pain. The patient is able to control the electrical impulses with a remote and reduce pain.

"It is an issue of quality of life," explains Dr. Suwan. She is known for her expertise in treating headaches and has been asked to speak before many different groups across the United States. Dr. Suwan's practice is the Advanced Chicago Headache Clinic with offices in Hinsdale, Lisle and Chicago. She sees most of her patients at her Lisle location inside the Wyndam Hotel.

"We all do not have the luxury of being able to be in bed for two days with a headache," says Dr. Suwan referring to the estimated 30 million Americans suffering from migraines. Studies have shown that 50% of migraine sufferers are misdiagnosed. As a specialist in this field, Dr. Suwan hopes to give relief to those who have been unable to find effective treatment. "By finding out where the pain is coming from and then administering the right treatment, people can have an improved quality of life."