Treating Tension Headaches with Massage Therapy

Grace Adams, LMT, BCTMB

Body Conscious Massage Therapy

Massage

- ▶ Relaxation Massage
- ▶ Therapeutic Massage
  - ▶ Neuromuscular (NMT) and Myofascial therapy
  - ▶ Passive stretching
  - ▶ Homecare
- ▶ Training in the US widely varies
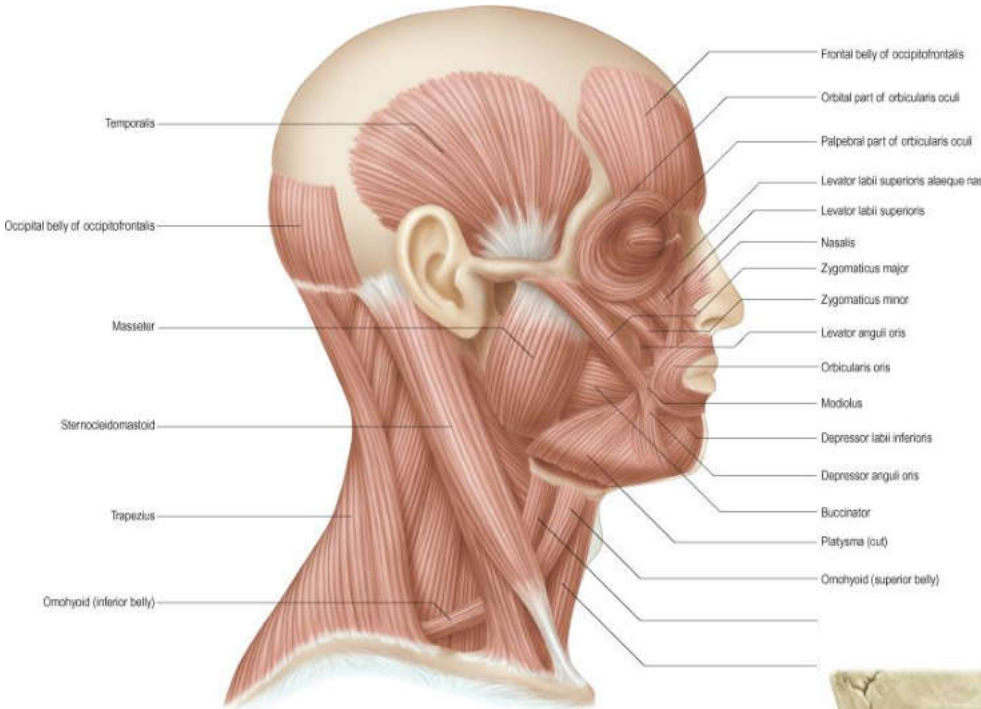- ▶ Certification/licensing/BCTMB

Migraine vs. Tension Headache

- Migraine
  - Only do certain types of bodywork during active migraines such as acupressure, cold therapy, and craniosacral
  - Symptom management with relaxation, myofascial and trigger point work between migraines
  - Many different types of migraines and many different triggers-can be difficult to find the source

- Tension
  - Can often find the source (muscles involved)
  - Relaxation, MYO, NMT, passive stretching, homecare
  - Can do bodywork during active headache and often see results immediately
 - Less frequent headaches with regular treatment

Anatomy Review

Temporalis

Occipital belly of occipitofrontalis

Masseter

Sternocleidomastoid

Trapezius

Omohyoid (inferior belly)

Frontal belly of occipitofrontalis

Orbital part of orbicularis oculi

Palpebral part of orbicularis oculi

Levator labii superioris alaeque nasi

Levator labii superioris

Nasalis

Zygomaticus major

Zygomaticus minor

Levator anguli oris

Orbicularis oris

Modiolus

Depressor labii inferioris

Depressor anguli oris

Buccinator

Platysma (cut)

Omohyoid (superior belly)

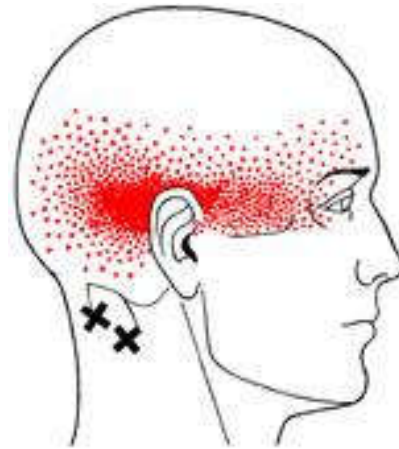© Elsevier Ltd 2005. Standring: Gray's Anatomy 39e - www.graysanatomyonline.com
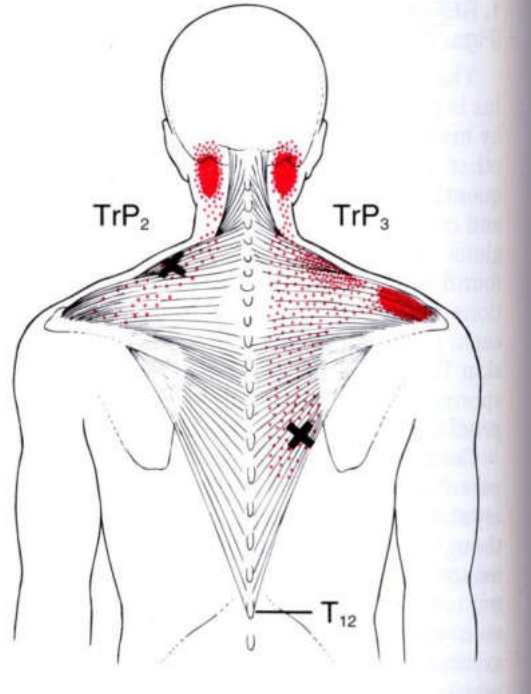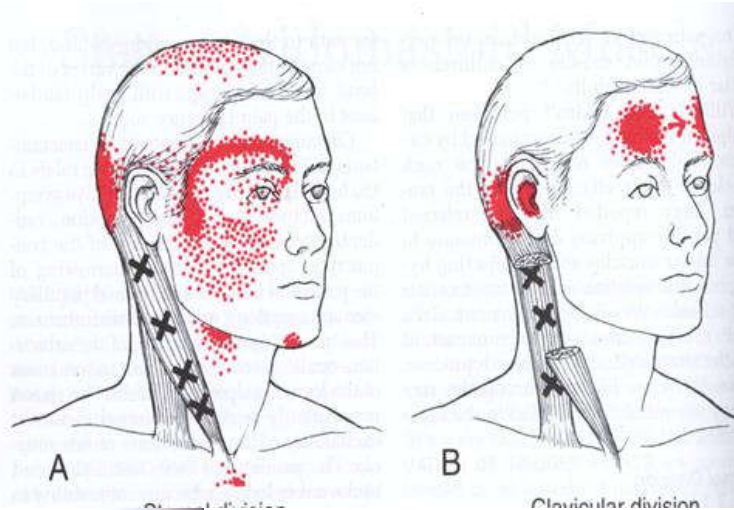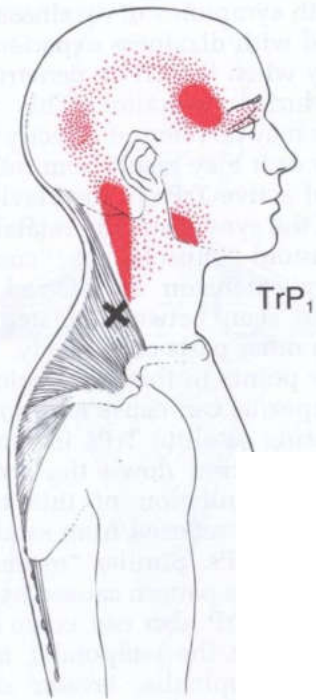
ishers

Musculoskeletal Triggers
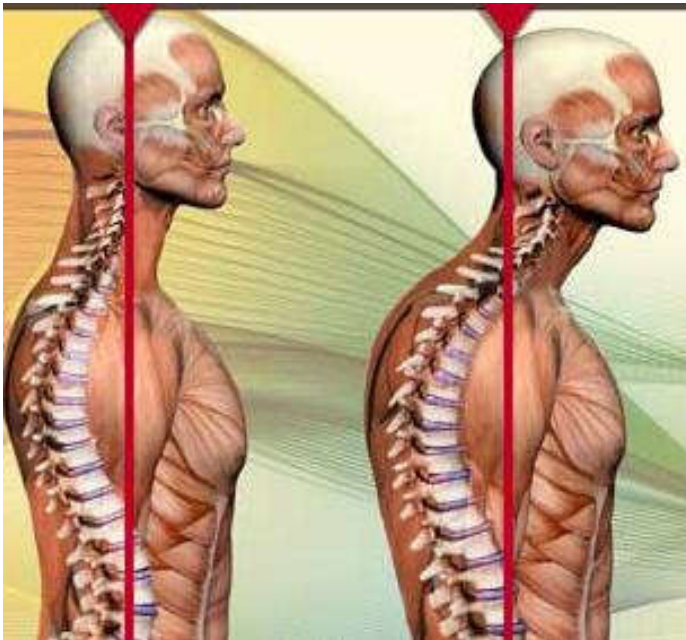
- Posture
  - Weak/tight muscles
- Tension related to stress and anxiety
- Injury
- TMJ dysfunction

Trigger Point Referral Patterns

Trigger point work:

▶ What is a trigger point? Adhesions found in fascia or muscle fiber that pinch off free nerve endings and cut off blood supply to that area of the tissue

▶ Trigger points can refer pain to different areas of the body

▶ There are many ways to treat trigger points

▶ Common ways to treat: muscle stripping and friction for tight fibers, holding thumb or finger pressure (easing deeper with their breath and slowly releasing after 60-90 seconds)

Touch Therapy for Beginners:

- ▶ Make sure your hands are sanitized and nails filed

- ▶ Always be gentle, slow and present with your work

- ▶ Make sure you and your client are in a comfortable position for the therapy

- ▶ Always "say hello" to your body by approaching the body with a gentle hold to start

- ▶ Always "say goodbye" to the body with some sort of gentle hold or nerve strokes to end therapy

Common Techniques and Terminology:

- Stripping: taking fingertips or thumb and sliding along muscle in the direction of muscle fiber (usually done after lotion is applied)

- Friction: taking fingertips/thumb and pushing along or across muscle fiber or fascia (with shorter and faster movement then stripping)

- Pincer grasp: Using fingers and thumb to "pinch" an area of muscle or fascia (we usually pincer grasp and hold or "unroll")

- Traction: usually done by holding and gently leaning your body away or rocking your body back and forth

- Trigger point hold: using your thumb or fingertip, sink into tight tissue slowly, hold for 60-90 seconds and then slowly release on their exhalation

Specific Techniques: Head hold

Specific Techniques: Temporalis circles

Specific Techniques: Neck traction

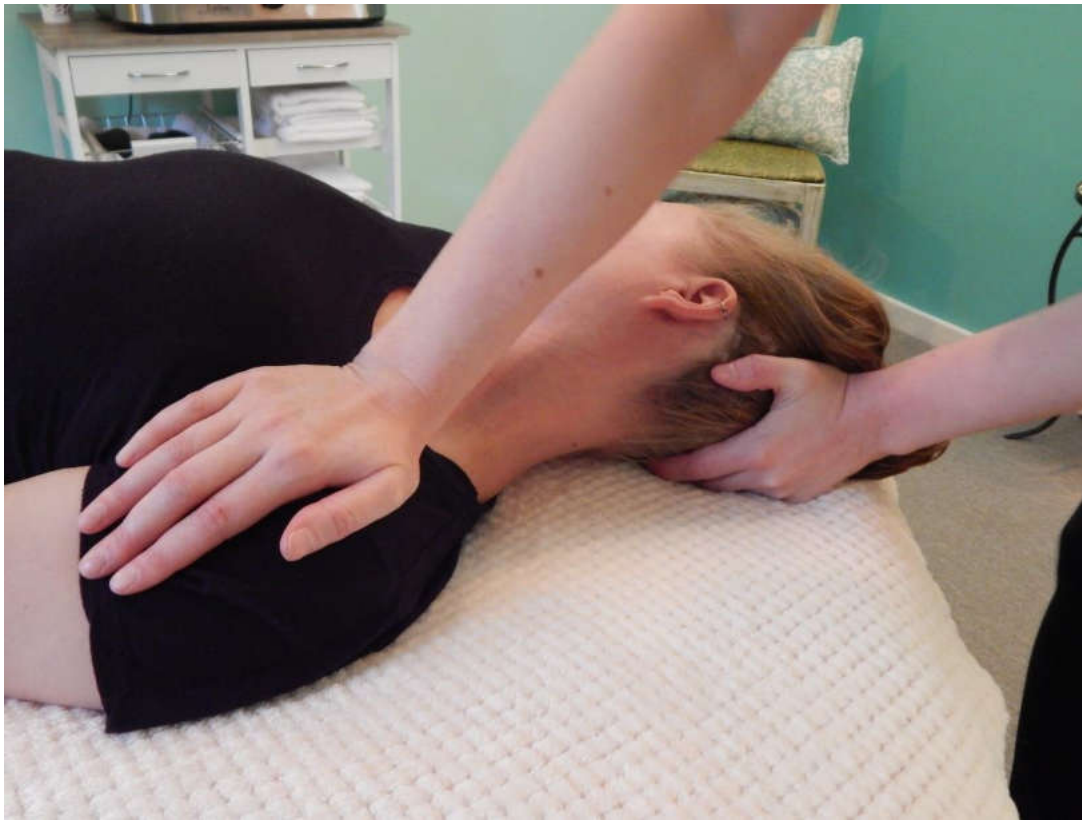# Specific Techniques: Splenius Muscles

Specific Techniques: Suboccipital muscles

Specific Techniques: Sternocleidomastoid muscle

Specific Techniques: Gentle neck stretch

Specific Techniques: Upper and Middle Trapezius muscle

Conclusion

- Therapeutic massage can be helpful for tension type headache treatment

- Migraines are not treated the same as tension headaches and require their own considerations

- It is important to find board certified (BCTMB) therapists for massage referrals

- Clarify types of bodywork offered by your local providers

Additional Information:

- [Migraine & Massage](#) by Gina Rogers, LMT

- AMTA (American Massage Therapy Association) Massage for Headaches: [AMTA Article on Tension headaches with research links.](#)

- National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork: https://www.ncbtmb.org/

Contact:

Grace Adams, LMT, BCTMB, founder of Body Conscious Massage Therapy

gracebcmassage@gmail.com

Gina Rogers, LMT Migraine Therapy & Lymphatic Massage Program Director at Body Conscious Massage Therapy

ginabcmassage@gmail.com

Body Conscious LLC

BodyConsciousMassageTherapy.com