

MEDICAL NEWS

More Information for Headache Sufferers

Naperville Mom and Daughter Together on their Journey from Suffering to Healing

To some, the occasional headache may be nothing more than a minor annoyance that goes away after a breath of fresh air.

But for Kathy Elsesser, headaches have become a way of life for the past 30 years. Formerly from Upstate New York, Elsesser, 57, began her bout with headaches back in her early 20's, which forced the elementary special education teacher to miss work and even request a year's leave of absence in order to try and get a handle of her life.

Like many headache sufferers, she worked her way through more than a handful of specialists trying to find answers.

"I started working back in New York with a chiropractor who thought that some of my problems had to do with my jaw being out of alignment," Elsesser said. "In spite of the pain I was having, I still tried to work all the time. There were times when I'd be out of work two or three days, and finally, I decided to take a year's leave and go in another direction."

That direction was to seek help from a psychiatrist, who believed Elsesser's problems were largely emotional and stress related. Her therapist believed that by resolving inner conflicts, the patient could also get a handle on the headaches.

"The counseling I got did work some of the time," Elsesser admitted. "I could see problems developing at work and get a handle on them before they exploded into a headache. When I did get a headache, I took over-the-counter medication, but it didn't help much."

In 1994, the Elsesser family moved here to Illinois and within a few years, Kathy was working with a neurologist who put her on medication for her headaches, often relying on Excedrin which she said only masked the symptoms of her pain and produced the dreaded rebound headaches. This was followed by another encounter with a chiropractor, as Elsesser was beginning to experience back problems as well.

But in the end, that second chiropractor proved to be the breakthrough Elsesser had been looking for.

"The doctor mentioned to me something about meeting a medical doctor at a convention who he thought might be able to help me," she said. "The medical doctor was Dr. Nesreen Suwan, who both my daughter and I have been seeing now for about two years."

Elsesser's daughter Alexa, 17, likewise suffers from headaches which began for her back in the eighth grade. She said she experiences them often on a weekly basis - headaches that make her sensitive to light, and sound, and sometimes make her dizzy.

Alexa worked for a while with a pediatric neurologist, who suggested over-the-counter medication followed by a series of prescriptions that likewise didn't work. But during her sophomore year of high school, she found Dr. Suwan, who she said "has improved the quality of her life by 75-percent."

"My other doctor had basically reached a standstill, but Dr. Suwan kept trying various medications and dosages in search of a solution," Alexa said. "Finally, I started receiving nerve block injections which have made a big difference. At first, they would only stop the pain for a day, but over time, the effects are lasting longer."

Her mother is also receiving nerve block injections.

"My Daughter and I are enjoying the chance of living a more normal life." Elsesser said.

"My daughter has multiple health issues, so for her, there are other things besides the headaches, but we both have improved the quality of our lives since we started seeing Dr. Suwan," she said. "One of the things I like about her is that she is professional - she keeps looking for new things, and I know if there is a better treatment out there, she'll find it."



N. Suwan, M.D

Dr. Suwan suffers from migraines herself, a fact that Elsesser believes has added to her doctor's empathy and understanding.

"When you talk to her [Dr. Suwan] - you get the sense she cares and that she understands because she has been through this herself," Elsesser said. "I believe all the doctors I have worked with over the past 30 years have tried to do their best, but right now, Dr. Suwan is right for my daughter and I and seems to have the answers we need. What she's done has made a huge difference."

"Earlier in 2006, it was reported at the annual meeting of neurologists (The American Academy of Neurology) that treating headaches with occipital nerve block was effective. Occipital nerve block is a procedure where anesthetic agent is injected near the occipital

nerve on the back of the head near the base of the skull. Within a few minutes, more than 75% of patients would experience very significant relief with their pain, light sensitivity and the scalp pain and sensitivity. Reported side effects are very minimal and I never experience any with my patients" Dr Suwan stated. "It is a local treatment and does not mess up the whole body with oral pain killers that may have endless side effects."

Dr. Suwan is a Loyola University trained board certified neurologist, board certified in electrodiagnostic medicine, board certified in pain medicine, with extra certification in headache medicine. Dr. Suwan served as a director of University Pain Center Headache Clinic that is affiliated with Rush University Pain Center. She is a member of the American Headache Society, National Headache Foundation, American Academy of Pain Medicine and American Society of Interventional Pain Management Physicians. Currently, she is the director of Chicago Headache Clinic, and Chicago Academy of Pain and Spine. Her areas of clinical expertise include migraine headaches, chronic daily headaches and other types of headaches and facial pain syndromes, and pain syndromes related to nerve disorders.

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Nesreen Suwan, M.D
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