

IT'S A SIMPLE PROCEDURE – AND PROVIDES ALMOST INSTANT AND DESPERATELY NEEDED RELIEF

BY MICHELLE PIETERS



ROWAN LOMBARD



WHEN TO GO TO A DOCTOR

- * If you have headaches more than three times a week.
- * If headaches affect your lifestyle.
- * When they're so bad you take painkillers every day and more than is recommended.
- * If you have a stiff neck and high temperature.
- * If you're short of breath, dizzy, drowsy or confused.



No more MIGRAINES!



hIS migraines were so bad that as a young boy he missed two years of school, suffering almost constant blinding headaches that made it impossible for him to do his schoolwork properly. The pain always began gradually but built up until the left side of his face was so numb it

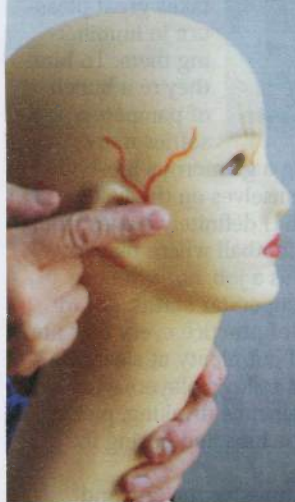
was difficult to talk, recalls René Munya (40), a developer and businessman from Randjiesfontien near Midrand, Gauteng. Then a groundbreaking operation by a South African surgeon changed his life. The procedure, performed by Dr Elliot Shevel, head of the Headache Clinic in Johannesburg, is a global first and is making waves in the international medical world.

René, who started having migraines in 1981, had the operation about four years ago and hasn't looked back since. "I grew up in the then Zaire (now DRC) and as a teenager missed two years of school because the headaches were so bad. Later I had to repeat those two years," René says. In 1990 he immigrated to South Africa. "I saw so many doctors and tried all kinds of

medicines but nothing helped." One day René drove past the Headache Clinic and decided then and there to go inside. "That's how I met Dr Shevel. When he told me about the operation I didn't hesitate. I was desperate." Dr Shevel performed a world first operation on René. "We weren't sure how many little veins were causing the headaches and initially operated

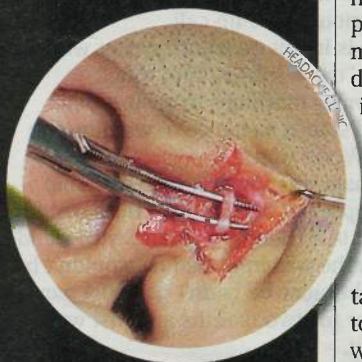
COMBINATION | CONSULT | JEWEL | SHEVEL

“ IF I DIDN'T HAVE A HEADACHE I WAS WORRIED ABOUT WHEN THE NEXT ONE WOULD HIT ”



ROMYNI LOHMEYER

ABOVE: Dr Elliot Shevel of the Headache Clinic in Johannesburg points to the arteries that are tied off during the operation. LEFT: A mark is made on the side of the head and the area is anaesthetised.



HEADACHE CLINIC

HEADACHE CLINIC

MAIN PICTURE: René Munya was the first person to undergo the procedure. ABOVE and LEFT: The incision and artery to be tied off can clearly be seen.

on just six," Dr Shevel says.

Afterwards René still had the occasional headache and Dr Shevel operated on another two little veins. Since then he hasn't had any more migraines.

"It's a huge relief because the headaches were affecting my whole life. I had no social life and even when I was lucky enough not to have a headache I was worrying about when the

next one would hit," René says.

DR SHEVEL, a maxillofacial surgeon specialising in the jaw, face and mouth, is excited about his groundbreaking procedure. He's the only surgeon in the world who performs it and hopes to train other doctors to do the op.

Until now doctors have believed tiny arteries in the brain cause the pain and that only medication could help, he says. Then by chance he came to realise surface blood vessels beneath the scalp were the culprits in many cases.

In 1995 he was about to operate on a patient's mouth when she complained of a severe headache.

"I noticed a tiny blood vessel pulsing on the side of her head. When I pressed it the pain disappeared. When I lifted my finger it returned. I had no doubt these arteries were causing the pain and it wouldn't be risky to tie them off."

Dr Shevel performed the procedure and his patient hasn't had a headache since.

Thirteen years and many ops later he's publishing details of his work. "I first wanted to see whether the operations would be successful in the long term," he says.

His did his most recent research with Dr Egilius Spierings, a professor of neurology at Harvard University in America. Their results recently appeared in *Therapy*, a British medical journal.

Things have moved fast since then. The South African government has given Dr Shevel a grant to conduct research overseas once a year for three years. In July he's off to the island of Sardinia to work with Italian migraine expert Professor Carlo Cianchetti.

"Together we'll determine methods that will help other doctors to diagnose the condi-

tion correctly and operate," he says.

Headaches are caused mainly by muscle spasms in the neck and shoulders and by surface blood vessels. His procedure is applicable only when migraines are caused by surface blood vessels. It's the cause of up to 50 per cent of sufferers' migraines.

The procedure involves making a small cut on the side or back of the head, then cauterising or searing small blood vessels beneath the scalp. It takes 30 to 90 minutes and costs between R3 000 and R30 000, depending on the number of blood vessels involved. Some medical aids pay for the procedure.

HEADACHES are among the most common reasons for missing work or school – up to 20 per cent of the world's

population suffers from them, Dr Shevel says.

"The difference between a headache and a migraine is the degree of pain. When you become nauseous and sensitive to light and sound a headache has become a migraine."

People should take note of what causes their headaches. For instance caffeine – and caffeine withdrawal – can trigger them. "That's why some people have headaches only on weekends – they sleep late on a Saturday, don't get their usual early morning coffee and they have withdrawal symptoms."

Low blood sugar can also be a cause, especially if you don't have breakfast. Weather changes and being in the sun are also culprits, as are hormonal changes – that's why women are three times more likely than men to suffer headaches. □

“ COPING WITH MIGRAINES ”

DO

- * Eat a balanced diet. Make sure you take in enough magnesium, calcium and vitamin B2, which help prevent headaches.
- * An ice pack on your forehead will help to narrow swollen arteries and relieve tension headaches.
- * Avoid bright flashing lights. Even a TV or computer screen could contribute to your headache.
- * Breathing deeply helps you to relax, relieves tension and provides more oxygen to your blood vessels.
- * Massage your neck and shoulders or have it done by a therapist.
- * Stretch for at least five minutes a day to loosen stiff muscles.
- * Keep a headache diary: when did it start, how long did it last, could something you ate have triggered it?
- * Exercise regularly to relieve tension and stimulate circulation.

DON'T

- * Skip meals. Keep your blood sugar levels stable by eating regularly and at least three times a day.
- * Take too many painkillers. Your body gets used to them and this will make headaches worse in the long run.
- * Lose out on sleep. Try to sleep seven or eight hours a night. Tiredness is a major cause of headaches.
- * Sleep on your stomach or in any other position that could cause muscle spasms in your neck.