
Managing Your Migraine Pain Naturally

More than 29.5 million Americans suffer from Migraines. Biofeedback is a natural therapy approved by many health insurers for the relief and management of Migraine Pain. It is important to work with an experienced Biofeedback Specialist who can coach you with managing your stress triggers. Biofeedback is a way to retrain your body's pain response as you go through a series of sessions to help you manage pain to prevent a full blown migraine or any migraine like pain. Biofeedback helps by retraining the body's physical reaction to the stress of pain in a variety of ways and is individualized according to your unique stress triggers. The stress triggers that can bring on a tendency for migraine pain can come from physical injuries, hormonal imbalances, emotional reactions to unresolved issues and even hidden food allergies or something as simple as dehydration or exposure to certain chemicals.

Helping you trace the unique stress triggers that can set the course for a migraine or any type of pain really, takes patience and a keen understanding of how your body may be unknowingly triggering the pain response that ends with you in a dark room, in pain, and isolated from your family as you wait for the episode to pass. As a migraine sufferer myself, I know this can take moments or in worst case scenario, even days before the pain lets up.

My own experience with migraine pain led me to *Heal Your Headache* by Dr. David Buchholz of Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Buchholz lists the top migraine triggers found in food. Don't be surprised to find many of your favorite foods on this list, I was surprised to see how many items on this list I eat regularly and have been able to pinpoint how they are triggering my pain. See if you can too!

Caffeine: Found in coffee, tea, colas, sodas and chocolate. Suddenly stopping caffeinated drinks without weaning yourself can result in moderate to severe headaches. The tricky part with caffeine is that for some people, a strong cup of coffee can actually stop a migraine from progressing. One of the most common over the counter pain relievers marketed for migraine pain is nothing more than a high dose of caffeine. Still, for most, caffeine can be a migraine trigger.

Chocolate: Anything with cocoa including food flavorings. Chocolate contains phenylthylamine, a nervous system stimulant. It is also sold as a dietary supplement for mood and weight loss. It can cause blood vessels to expand/contract, sometimes suddenly, which can trigger head pain. Chocolate can also contain high amounts of caffeine.

Dairy products: This includes all cheeses and any foods prepared with cheese. The more aged the cheese the worse the trigger. White cheeses such as cottage, ricotta and cream cheese have not been found to be as much of a trigger however, yogurt may be a culprit.

Deli Meats and Fish: Any item in this category that has been aged, cured, canned, fermented, marinated, smoked or tenderized may trigger head pain according to Dr. Buchholz. Foods preserved with nitrates or nitrites should be on your no-no list. Also, it may be best to avoid beef and chicken livers as well. The liver detoxifies the body, and eating animal liver may trigger an attack from something the animal has eaten. We are what we eat!

Certain Fruits and Vegetables: Some fruits to be on the lookout for are: citrus fruits and fruit juices, bananas, raisins and other dried fruits preserved with sulfites, raspberries, red plums, papayas, passion fruit, figs, dates and avocados. Vegetable triggers can include sauerkraut, pea pods, beans (from fava to navy to lentils). The worst vegetable offender may be onions, although baby onions seem to be ok for most.

Aspartame: Found in many diet soda drinks and diet foods, aspartame contains excitotoxins known to negatively affect brain and nerve cells. It is thought that long term use of Aspartame can contribute to migraines, even if one had stopped using it for a period of time due to the toxic buildup that is believed to occur.

Monosodium Glutamate or MSG: Most commonly known to be used in Chinese food, but it is also found in most processed and packaged foods on your grocers' shelf. Look for it as Natural Flavorings, Hydrolyzed Vegetable Protein or HVP, Glutamate, Textured Protein, Soy based ingredients and more. MSG is also an excitotoxin and can trigger more than migraines, research by Dr. Russell Blaylock, a prominent neurologist who exposed the Aspartame problem. Dr. Blaylock's research has proven that ingestion of any excitotoxin such as MSG, Aspartame, and others actually generates holes in the brain over time. I believe that might qualify as a migraine trigger if nothing else! (Authors opinion: I would avoid any artificial sweetener to be safe, Stevia and Xylitol from wood birch – not corn, are the only two sweeteners I personally use and feel are safe)

Freshly baked yeast breads: Especially problematic is sourdough. Also watch out for bagels, doughnuts, pizza dough and soft pretzels less than 24 hours out of the oven.

Nuts: All nuts and nut butters can be culprits, this includes coconut, their oils, meat, milks and as added ingredients.

Red Wine: Too much red wine or any dark alcohol can stack the decks against you. Of all drinking alcohols, Vodka is best tolerated.

Vinegars: Most vinegars cause triggers with Balsamic being the most problematic. White vinegar seems to cause the least problem.

While this list is by no means all inclusive, these are the most likely ingredients to trigger a migraine. I have found that by eliminating them all for a 2 week period, then taking one category and adding items back in slowly, then checking in with yourself to see if pain develops over a 48 hour period, will help you begin to learn what foods may be a trigger for you.

Natural Cures

Here are some nutritional supplements that have been proven helpful to manage not only migraine pain: The recommended values listed are from various studies. Always check with your licensed health care provider before adding any nutritional or homeopathic supplements, especially if you are taking any prescription medication. Some supplements may interfere with medication:

Riboflavin, also known as vitamin B2. Two hundred milligrams of B2 twice a day. The key is to take the vitamin every day whether or not you have any head pain.

Butterbur root extract has anti-inflammatory and anti-allergy properties. It has also been shown to reduce smooth muscle spasms. In a recent four month study period, migraine attack frequency was reduced by 68 percent for those receiving 75 milligrams of the supplement twice daily.

Magnesium is crucial for cellular function. When magnesium is deficient, a headache may result. 600 mg per day may reduce migraine frequency. Magnesium has been suspected of contributing to headaches and migraines for over 70 years. Researchers have been investigating links between low magnesium's role in stabilizing blood vessels, reducing muscle spasms and normalizing nerve and muscle function, helping the body absorb proteins and its role in keeping bones strong. Magnesium can be found in wheat germ, beans, whole grains, seafood, dark green leafy vegetables and milk. Bananas and soy products are also high in magnesium but can also be a migraine trigger, so beware. High doses of magnesium can cause diarrhea until your body adjusts so it might be best to start out slowly.

Coenzyme Q10 studies used 150 - 300 milligrams, three times a day as a migraine preventative. In a 2002 study up to 600 milligrams per day were given without side effects. Gel caps seem to be more effective over other forms according to this study, with 61.3% experiencing a 50% reduction in frequency of attacks by the end of the 4 month trial period. This can take 5-12 weeks to achieve this effect.

Feverfew has long been used for headaches. It prevents blood vessel constriction which is a leading cause of headaches. It also inhibits two headache triggers believed to be involved in the inflammation process, arachidonic acid and prostaglandins. Researchers recommend 100 milligrams, up to four times per day. Several studies have been done with mixed results and side effects can include abdominal pain, gas, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting and nervousness. If you are allergic to Chamomile, ragweed or yarrow, you should not take feverfew. It may interact with blood thinning medications and should not be taken by people with bleeding disorders or 2-3 weeks before or after a surgery to be safe.

Vitamin D plays a significant role in the overall health of the body. From improving immunity to pain management to cancer prevention, most people are deficient in this inexpensive vitamin. It is best to know your levels before you supplement, you can request a simple blood test to find out what your Vitamin D level is before you begin supplementation.

Homeopathic Remedies, Essential Oils and Flower Essences can also help calm down the roar of a migraine once it has gotten started. Search online for encyclopedias and reference manuals if you are interested in this for support.

- **Mag/Phos** is a cell salt containing Magnesium and Phosphorous that helps muscle spasms.
- **Hypericum** is a homeopathic remedy that calms nerve pain.
- **Nux vomica** can help with nausea and indigestion.

In my office I offer combination homeopathic remedies that are individualized according to your body's needs. While not every supplement will work for everyone, usually a combination of these supplements creates the best result. You must have patience and perseverance to find the balance that will work for your unique body and its pain management needs. Natural remedies sometimes can have immediate results but more often than not, it takes some time to find the right balance for you. Be patient and keep trying. Remember, you didn't get your pain overnight, your body needs some time and support to find its way back to balance.

Self help ideas you can try:

- *Avoid or limit caffeine and chocolate*
- *Eliminate all foods and drinks with artificial sweeteners such as Aspartame, Splenda, even some Stevia offerings, which is a safe sweetener even for diabetics, has shown up on grocery shelves mixed with Splenda. Read the labels to know what you're getting.*
- *Acupuncture is useful for some.*
- *Biofeedback sessions helps to retrain your body's pain response.*
- *Eat breakfast and have regular meals every few hours. Many migraines can be triggered from skipping meals.*
- *Stop wearing perfumes or scented products, including dryer sheets, laundry softener and body lotions.*
- *Get the same hours of sleep each night, try not to over or under sleep.*
- *Avoid MSG and recognize it is in most processed and packaged foods. It is not always listed on the label.*
- *Limit your time on your computer and take regular scheduled breaks where you can get up and walk away. The blinking of the screen happens faster than most eyes can track and this can trigger a migraine.*
- *Get regular exercise.*
- *Therapeutic Massage can work the knots out of the muscles that may be triggering spasms and impinging on nerves that brings on pain.*
- *Check your home for fumes, gas leaks, radon, mold which can be triggers.*
- *Get your allergies under control. Sinus buildup and pressure can be a trigger. Biofeedback has been useful in helping clients learn to manage the hyper reactive response that can bring on allergic reactions.*
- *Try out different forms of exercise or relaxation*
- *Identify and eliminate foods to which you have an intolerance or sensitivity to. Biofeedback can help you with this by helping you discover what foods causes stress reactions to your system.*

Home Study and Reference:

- *Life Extension, <http://www.lef.org>*
- *Dr. Mercola, <http://www.mercola.com>*

For more resources, check out <http://www.stressdetective.net>. Sign up for the monthly newsletter designed to give you information you can use to find your way back to wellness.

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