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# Migraines: Know Your Treatment Options

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# Migraines: Know Your Treatment Options

## 10 Ways to Instantly Relieve Migraines

When a migraine headache hits, all you really care about is relief. Nothing else matters, every other concern in the world takes a back seat to getting rid of the pain. If it's severe enough—and migraines pain can get pretty severe—you won't even care what it takes to get that relief. Not step is too outrageous; too off the wall.

Instant relief for migraines may be accomplished with over the counter medication such as ibuprofen or migraine-strength aspirin. But one man's instant is another man's intolerable wait. There are certain steps you can take that have proven effective in instantly relieving migraine pain in other sufferers. Most, if not all, probably won't work for you, but you just may get lucky enough to stumble across one that does the trick.

1) One of the causes of migraines is the rush of blood to the head, so constricting the blood vessels to slow down that rush can often lead to relief. As anyone who remembers elementary science class knows, heat expands and cold contracts. Therefore, applying cold compresses to the forehead and/or back of the neck is a good starting point.

2) In keeping with the same concept as the above, try dipping your fingertips into ice cold water and massaging your temples and neck. This method combines the attempt to constrict blood vessels with the soothing relief of a massage, and is much better for those people who just can't stand to have a wet cloth weighing down on their forehead.

3) Some migraines are triggered by stress, in particular the building up of anger. Believe it or not, but one method of relieving the pain very quickly is simply to watch something funny. Don't make the mistake of going to a movie or a comedy club, however. The key here is relaxation. Find a place where you can relax by yourself and cool down while laughing.

4) Aerobic exercise is another terrific method of instantly relieving pain. In addition to taking your mind off the pain, the exercise gets the blood flowing throughout the body, helping to constrict

5) Maybe the most enjoyable method of attaining relief quickly—and if you choose this method you may not necessarily want to think of terms of quick release—is by engaging in sexual activity. Some research has concluded that migraines are especially difficult to get rid of because the pain is so intense that sufferers can't think of anything else. Sex is a great way to get your mind off your suffering. Indeed, instead of a headache as an excuse not to have sex, think of a migraine as the perfect excuse to have sex.

6) Turn out the lights, pull shades and close the curtains. Turn off and otherwise eliminate all noise. Lay down comfortably, whether that means flat on your back with no pillow or on your side with two pillows. Simply relaxing in a dark, quiet room is often enough to quickly alleviate your pain.

7) Intake caffeine. While caffeine can trigger a migraine, it can also be used to relieve it. Generally speaking, caffeine as a relief method works best for those whose migraines are, indeed, not caused by caffeine. Keep a journal to determine what seems to be causing your headaches and if you're sure that it isn't caffeine, then at the first sign of a headache, try drinking coffee, tea or a soda high in caffeine.

8) Take a course in biofeedback and engage in this highly recommended manner of migraine management.

9) Move to a different environment. Smells, noise and even colors may have triggered your headache. You may actually be able to get rid of the pain simply by moving away from the trigger.

10) This one is pretty radical and may not even be considered by many of you, but if your head is pounding hard enough and you reach the point where you are willing to try anything, then this is the method for you. Often, migraines are caused a buildup of toxicity in the digestive tract. One way to clear that out and get rid of the headache is with a cool water enema.

## **Essential Migraine Medications**

Although there are many other alternative therapies for treating migraines, probably the first thing most of us will turn to is medication. Society today looks for quick answers found inside a pill, tablet or capsule to all our various ailments. There is certainly nothing wrong with resorting to medication, but when it comes to migraines one should be especially careful about what kind they use.

### **ASPIRIN**

Aspirin is the grand old standby for pain relief. It seems as though aspirin has been around forever and its reputation is getting better every day as it has become a recommended daily preventative measure against heart attacks. Here are some thing to keep in mind when using aspirin to treat migraines.

- Aspirin should never be given to children under 12.
- Absorption of aspirin is much more effective and the chances for stomach problems are significantly decreased when dissolved in water.
- Aspirin can be used in combination with codeine; however be aware that codeine often causes constipation and/or dizziness.

### **PARACETAMOL**

- Similar to aspirin, but usually less irritating to the stomach lining.

- Is often used in combination with codeine or sedatives which often strengthens its ability to relieve pain.
- Paracetamol can cause liver damage if taken in excessive quantities.

### **SUMATRIPTAN (Imigran)**

- Prescription drug developed specifically to act against migraine headache.
- It has been proven to be quite effective against migraine.
- Imigran is available in tablet, injection and nasal spray forms.
- Sumatriptan effects include nausea, and chest and throat tightness.
- Sumatriptan should be avoided by those suffering from heart disease, poor circulation or angina.

### **METOCLOPRAMIDE (maxalon)**

- A prescription medicine used in combination with aspirin as an anti-nausea drug.
- May improve the absorption of other migraine drugs.

### **ERGOTAMINE (Ergodryl, Cafergot, Migral)**

- Another effective prescription drug, this one was originally derived from a fungus that grows on rye.
  - Unlike the other medications, this one is not a painkiller, but instead works specifically to reduce the pressure of blood vessels which causes migraine headaches.
  - Is often used in combination with caffeine in order to improve its effectiveness.
  - It is available in both tablet and suppository form
  - Has been known to cause nausea.
  - Works by causing a narrowing of the arteries, which may worsen poor circulation.
  - This medication should not be used in individuals who suffer from heart angina.
- Dihydroergotamine (Dihydergot) is a similar drug that is given by injection.

### **PIZOTIFEN (Sandomigran)**

- This is perhaps the most commonly prescribed preventative medication for migraines.
- Common side effects associated with pizotifen include sedation and weight gain.

### **PROPRANOLOL (Inderal, Deralin)**

- Originally introduced to treat high blood pressure.
- Multiple side effects ranging from insomnia, depression and weight gain to nightmares, impotence, and dizziness due to low blood pressure.
- May aggravate asthma and poor circulation, but is usually safe in heart disease and angina.
- Some people experience problems in absorbing this drug, so high doses may be required.

## **AMITRIPTYLINE (Tryptanol and other brands)**

- The medication works on headaches independently of its antidepressant action.
- Side effects include dry mouth, sedation, weight gain, occasionally blurred vision, constipation, and bladder problems.
- New antidepressants like fluoxetine (Prozac) and similar drugs are not as effective as headache preventatives.

## **VALPROATE (Epilim)**

- Introduced initially to treat epilepsy, it was found to act against most forms of headaches.
- Side effects include weight gain, nausea, tremor, hair loss and liver injury.

## **FEVERFEW**

- Not so much a medication as an herbal extract that has been found effective for treating migraine headache.
- Few side effects, but be aware that some commercial preparations of feverfew may be too weak to be active against headache.

## **METHYSERGIDE (Deseril)**

- Methysergide is related to ergotamine.
- Often causes upset stomachs and has also been known to cause muscle aches and dizziness.
- When used over long periods of time, methysergide has caused severe scarring around the kidneys, therefore it must be used under strict medical supervision.

## **Prescription Medication and Migraine Relief**

New therapies to treat headaches go back to the beginning of the last century, when ergotamine tartrate was first isolated in a laboratory. It was this development which introduced clinical practice into treating migraines. Ergotamine works by constricting blood vessels in the head. About twenty-five years later researchers began to suspect that disturbances in the brain's serotonin level played a role in migraine.

The drug, methysergide, a serotonin antagonist that prevents migraine attacks, was introduced into clinical practice in 1958. In recent years, new technologies have made it possible for researchers to identify serotonin receptors throughout the body. It is now believed that serotonin levels actually decrease at the onset of a migraine attack, causing blood vessels to dilate and surrounding tissues to swell. This is that brings on the pain.

Studies show that stimulating certain subtypes of serotonin receptors constrict blood vessels in the head, thereby eliminating an acute migraine attack. Ergotamine and DHE can also cause

nausea and vomiting because they stimulate dopamine receptors. This research has led to the development of the new triton drugs that switch on appropriate serotonin receptors, providing effective migraine relief without many of the side effects of earlier drugs.

Examples of medications currently on the market used to prevent migraines include: propranolol (brand name: Inderal), timolol (brand name: Blocadren), divalproex (brand name: Depakote) and some antidepressants.

Symptomatic relief medications are used, as their description suggests, in the relief of the actual symptoms that are most commonly associated with migraines. These include head pain, nausea and vomiting.

Abortive medications are used at the first sign of a migraine in an attempt to halt the process that causes the headache pain. Abortive medications work by constricting the blood vessels, bringing them back to normal and relieving the throbbing pain.

Preventive (prophylactic) medications are prescribed for severe headaches that occur more than twice a month, and that significantly interfere with daily activities. Preventive medications are intended to reduce both the frequency and the severity of the headache and are usually taken daily. A medicine called ergotamine (Ergostat) has been effective both when used by itself and when used in combination with other medicines. Dihydroergotamine (Migranal, D.H.E. 45) is related to ergotamine and has also found to be effective.

Other prescription medicines for migraines include

- sumatriptan (brand name: Imitrex)
- zolmitriptan (brand name: Zomig)
- naratriptan (brand name: Amerge)
- rizatriptan (brand name: Maxalt)
- almotriptan (brand name: Axert)
- eletriptan (brand name: Relpax)
- frovatriptan (brand name: Frova)

If after taking any of these medications you still suffer migraine pain, then an even stronger medicine may be recommended. These ultrastrength migraine medications include a narcotic (brand name: Stadol nasal spray) and medicines that contain a barbiturate. Before moving on to this hard stuff, however, be aware that these medications are often habit-forming and should be used with extreme caution and only as absolutely needed. As with any medication, it is important to carefully follow the label instructions and your physician's advice.

The effectiveness of migraine treatment depends on a variety of factors. It's very important to determine what your migraine trigger is. How successful you are in avoiding your, how proactive you are in administering your treatment, the patient is in using treatments such as relaxation or drugs and how well the patient responds to treatment.

The seven triptans include sumatriptan (Imitrex), zolmitriptan (Zomig), and naratriptan (Amerge). Unlike traditional migraine medications, which help the body tolerate headache pain,

triptans help manage the source of migraine pain by reducing "swelling" of the blood vessels in the brain and reducing inflammation, thus helping alleviate migraine pain.

Triptans are not recommended, however, for ocular migraines, because the constricting affect they have on blood vessels could cause problems in the retinal vessels, resulting in vision loss. The best treatment for ocular migraine, says Dr. Mays, is prevention—avoiding triggers, minimizing stress, maintaining a consistent schedule and getting enough sleep.

Treating migraines with prescriptive medication can be very effective, but don't count on it. Many do find relief through the newer medications on the market, but there are plenty who suffer through the trial period without any gain in the end. You may have to try out several medications before you come across the one that finally ends your misery.

### **What You Need to Know About Over-the-Counter Migraine Medication**

Several reports have concluded that overusing over the counter migraine medication often results in rebound headaches. All of these medicines are recommended to be stored in an area where the temperature is between twenty to twenty-five degrees Celsius or sixty-eight and seventy-seven degrees Fahrenheit. If you live somewhere where this can't be accomplished be aware that the effectiveness of these medications can be compromised.

Also of concern is if you receive your medication by mail. Leaving the medicine in your mailbox in temperatures outside the recommended range for even a few hours can seriously impair their effectiveness.

Most of these medications warn against the same type of side effects, but the frequency of complaints about those side effects vary tremendously from one user to another.

#### **Excedrin Migraine**

Active Ingredients: Acetaminophen 250g, Aspirin 250mg, Caffeine 65mg.  
Forms: Geltabs, Tablets, Capsules.

The recommended dose of Excedrin Migraine is two tablets taken at six-hour intervals. Excedrin Migraine actually contains the exact same ingredient combination as Excedrin Extra Strength. In fact, the only difference between Excedrin Migraine and Excedrin Extra Strength is that Excedrin Migraine comes with instructions containing a warning about treating migraines. The instructions warns patients to consult with a physician if their headache is accompanied by vomiting or requires bed rest. Excedrin Extra Strength also does not specifically contain migraines under its use section.

Excedrin has established a fine reputation among consumers. Usually it ranks at or near the in customer satisfaction surveys.

#### **Advil Migraine**

Active Ingredients: Ibuprofen 200mg. Also contains 20mg of potassium.  
Forms: Liquid filled capsule.

Important information: In the United States Advil Migraine is the only over the counter migraine medication available in liquid capsule form.

You should be aware that Advil Migraine contains the exact same ingredients as regular Advil. Customer satisfaction concerning this product varies. While many report that their recommended dosage often relieves their pain, many other complain that one must exceed dosage in order to get relief. Others complain that it upsets their stomach if they don't take it on a full stomach. Still others have complained about side effects such as nausea (see above), hives, swelling, etc. And yet others are simply unwilling to pay the extra price for this medication when they can buy the exact same medication under the regular Advil label.

### **Motrin Migraine Pain**

Active Ingredient: Ibuprofen 200mg.

Forms: Caplets.

Contains the exact same ingredients as Motrin IB. You should be aware that Motrin Migraine pills are smaller than most other migraine pills. The advantage here is that they are easier to swallow, but at the same time because they are so small they could easily be mistaken for candy by a small child so be sure to keep them out of reach of the young ones.

As with Advil, although perhaps even more, customer satisfaction truly runs the gamut when it comes to Motrin. Some migraine sufferers absolutely swear by it, while others say they will never take it again. There doesn't seem to be any pattern as to why it works so well on some patients and not at all on others.

It is recommended that you at least try Motrin because it just may be the answer to your prayers. On the other hand it may do you good at all. So therefore you've got all to gain and only a little bit of money to lose.

### **Naproxen**

Naproxen is in a class of drugs called nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) that work by reducing hormones that cause inflammation and pain in the body. Naproxen is sold under a wide variety of brand names across the world, including Aleve, Anaprox and Naprosyn.

### **TheraPatch Headache Cool Gel**

One of the latest products to hit the markets are pads that can be placed on the forehead, temple or the back of the head which contain a gel that cools the skin for up to four hours. You can get the TheraPatch in two forms. One contains no medication whatever, while the other uses the patch as a device to deliver an analgesic. TheraPatch Cool contains menthol, camphor and methyl salicylate, while TheraPatch Warm contains capsaicin. LecTec is also offering medicinal patch products as a drug delivery alternative in the cough-cold and anti-itch sections.

## **Treating Migraines with Supplements**

It would be terrific to come across a magic pill that ends migraine headaches the moment they hit. But unless you marry a witch or find a genie on a beach somewhere, it ain't going to happen any time soon. For the time being, the best approach to treating migraines is with prevention. Supplements are definitely the generals leading the way on this battlefield. Okay, we all know generals don't lead the way on the battlefield anymore, but the metaphor is still apt.

**Magnesium and calcium** Magnesium and calcium help attack migraines by keeping blood vessels malleable and helping the brain process serotonin.

Suggested dose: 400-mg magnesium and 100 mg calcium twice a day. Best taken with food to ease absorption. People with kidney disease should check with their doctor before taking magnesium.

**Feverfew** Feverfew is rapidly becoming one of the most popular of all the natural migraine remedies on the market because of its anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving properties. Studies show that it can decrease both the frequency and severity of migraines when taken over several months.

Suggested dose: 250 mg taken every morning, either with or without food, most effective when taken for extended periods. Look for standardized preparations containing at least 0.4% parthenolide, the active ingredient.

**5-HTP (5-hydroxytryptophan)**, is a form of acid tryptophan, an amino acid the body converts into serotonin. Although it may take several months to achieve the maximum benefit, some claim it is as effective as drugs. Nausea is the main side effect, but if it occurs, it usually dissipates within several days.

Suggested dose: 100 mg of 5-HTP 3 times a day. Take around mealtime. Don't combine with prescription antidepressants, such as Prozac.

**Riboflavin** Riboflavin, or vitamin B2, is believed to help prevent migraines by nourishing the brain's energy reserves. It may be even more effective than feverfew or 5-HTP when migraines are ongoing.

Suggested dose: 400 mg every morning. Riboflavin is most effective when taken long term for relief of chronic migraines.

**Vitamin C** Vitamin C is a powerful antioxidant that may also boost the production of stress-relieving hormones. Excess stress is thought to play a role in triggering migraines.

Suggested dose: 1,000 mg 3 times a day. Take with food. Reduce dose of vitamin C if diarrhea develops.

**Pantothenic acid** Pantothenic acid, or vitamin B5, strengthens nerves and promotes energy production. Like vitamin C, it may help the body produce stress-busting hormones. Pantothenic

acid also plays a role in serotonin production. Suggested dose: 400 mg twice a day. Take pantothenic acid with meals.

**KavaKava**, finally, can be a very useful herb for the relief of stress and anxiety, which are thought to trigger migraine attacks in some people.

Suggested dose: 250 mg 3 times a day. Kava may be most beneficial during times of high stress. Look for standardized extracts containing at least 30% kavalactones, the active ingredients in the herb. In America, the Food & Drug Administration has issued a warning about kava's possible adverse reactions in the liver recommending that users consult a physician if any of the following is applicable:

- Severe headaches develop suddenly, particularly if they first appear after age 35.
- A headache is accompanied by fever, stiff neck, weakness on one side of the body, loss of speech, blurred vision, or disorientation.
- A headache is accompanied by inflamed, clogged sinuses.
- A severe headache develops after intense physical exertion or a blow to the head.
- Migraines become more severe or more frequent.

The following supplements and herbs may be helpful in the treatment of migraine headaches:

Both **Alpha Linolenic Acid (ALA)** and **Gamma Linolenic Acid** reduce the severity and frequency of migraines by over 75%.

**Fish oil** helps prevent migraines by reducing blood vessel spasms.

**Vitamin B2** appears to completely suppress migraine headaches.

**Vitamin B3** (Riboflavin) helps to reduce the severity and frequency of migraines.

**Vitamin D** provides relief when used in conjunction with calcium.

One interesting supplement found to help with migraine relief is **capsaicin**, the chemical that makes hot peppers hot. It can be applied as an ointment inside the nose, though beware of burning.

## **Feverfew and Migraines**

Many people have found a new method of relief for their migraine headache pain. After trying all the medications at their local drug store and even finding that prescription drugs won't do the trick, an ever-growing number of migraine sufferers are turning to an older remedy: Feverfew.

Feverfew is the common name for *Tanacetum parthenium*, an herb related to the chrysanthemum. It is also known as Bachelor's Button. As a medicine, its use can be traced

at least as far back as the Dark Ages, and we're not just talking about the time before little pills in hard to open bottles. During the Middle Ages Feverfew was not only believed to help but also used to help treat various ailments, including fever reduction and, yes, headaches.

As with much folk remedies, especially folk remedies utilizing herbs, recent research has supported the effectiveness of using Feverfew as a migraine remedy. The scientific basis for this effectiveness lies in Feverfew's chemical makeup. Feverfew contains parthenolide, which is a substance that affects the levels of serotonin.

Serotonin is a major player in the development of migraines; it's a neurotransmitter, which is a chemical by which neurons communicate with one another. One of serotonin's functions is to modulate pain by blocking out nerve signals and enabling one to concentrate. During migraine attacks the level of serotonin is lowered, meaning that nerve signals aren't as effectively block. Many migraine medications essentially work by substituting its ingredients for the missing serotonin.

Parthenolide works against migraines by inhibiting the production of certain proteins in the body called prostaglandins. Prostaglandins contribute to inflammation, which is the actual cause of head pain brought on my migraines. Feverfew helps with reducing inflammatory reactions, and parthenolide also help by determining the amount of blood to be delivered to specific tissues.

The significance of this lies in the fact that migraine headaches are linked to the narrowing and widening of cranial blood vessels. It is the dilation of the blood vessels that produces the pressure, which causes the pounding headache that migraine sufferers must live with. Must live with at least until relief is finally found, that. Parthenolide actually works in conjunction with other active ingredients in Feverfew to regulate those serotonin levels in the brain.

Several studies have been conducted to determine whether Feverfew actually is effective in treating. Frankly, the jury is still out as the control process has been questioned, but nonetheless the evidence does point toward the product helping many people. Unfortunately, Feverfew has be determined to be almost completely ineffective in relieving a headache that has already begun; in order for this to work you must take it in a preventative manner. As a supplement that you can take to prevent headaches, Feverfew is made from flowers that are harvested only when the plant is at its most Parthenolide-rich content.

In choosing Feverfew to treat migraines, you actually have a little bit of choice. While the majority of migraine sufferers choose to ingest Feverfew in either capsule or tablet, it is also available other forms. Most stay away from the tea and tincture delivery method because both of these can be quite bitter. You can also choose to go straight to the source and chew the leaves, but many people discover this method irritate the mouth. The freeze-dried form of Feverfew has been the most deeply studied in regard to its migraine-preventive actions. Anecdotal evidence points to Feverfew in extracted forms not being as effective.

Feverfew has been found to be safe on the whole, though it can cause an upset stomach. In addition, if you allergic or sensitive to ragweed or chrysanthemums, you may want to stay away as it can cause reactions. Those who have any bleeding disorders or are taking blood-clotting medications should also check with a doctor before taking it.

Feverfew won't produce immediate results. Before you can adequately determine whether or not Feverfew is effective in preventing your migraines, you should take it regularly for at least a few weeks. Also, once you've begun taking Feverfew, do not suddenly stop as your headaches may recur.

## **Relaxation Treatment Techniques**

Stress is a common trigger for migraines. One method for relieving stress is relaxation. Easier said than done, right? When it comes to migraines, simply relaxing in a recliner isn't enough. You need to think extreme relaxation.

There are three major types of relaxation techniques:

- 1. Autogenic training.** Utilizes visual imaging and bodily awareness to advance the patient into a state of deep relaxation. The patient imagines a tranquil location, then begins focusing physical sensations that gradually move upward from the feet toward the head.
- 2. Progressive muscle relaxation.** Involves the slow tensing up and then releasing of each muscle group individually, beginning with the muscles in the toes and finishing with the head.
- 3. Meditation.** Uses either Transcendental Meditation involving the repetition of a mantra, mindfulness meditation in which patients focus their attention on their momentary thoughts and sensations.

Research has shown that in many cases meditation improves one's quality of life, while reducing stress. Studies also reveal that relaxation techniques assist in the reduction of the perception of pain. One study using patients undergoing colorectal surgery concluded that patients who listened to guided-imagery tapes before, during, and after the operation had less pain and needed fewer pain medications than those who did not. Meditation is also used extensively in treating post-traumatic stress disorder. In addition, relaxation techniques have been found useful in strengthening coping skills in migraine sufferers.

Fortunately, relaxation techniques can be done just about anywhere at any time. These techniques include:

- Deep breathing
- Active relaxation
- Stretching exercises
- Visualization
- Passive relaxation

**Deep breathing:** Simply breathe in deeply through the nose, letting your stomach expand as much as possible. It may be helpful to place your hands firmly & comfortably on your stomach during the exercise. Once you've breathed in as much as possible, hold your breath for a few

seconds & then exhale slowly through your mouth. Repeat this for 3 or 4 breaths several times a day.

**Active relaxation:** First tense, then relax each muscle in the body. Start with the muscles in the head & move down to the muscles in the feet.

Stretching exercises simple and easy and can be literally anywhere. It's a wonderful way to loosen up tight muscles and combat stress. Muscle tension is an automatic physical response to stress and the benefit of simple stretching exercises is often overlooked as a relaxation technique.

Another relaxation technique that can help to reduce stress is clearing the mind or visualization. **Visualization** is a type of directed meditation that involves using the mind's eye to clear away mental clutter or to actually visualize how a stressful situation can be handled successfully. Picturing the stressful situation in your mind such as a business presentation or an athletic performance & then visually rehearsing the outcome does this. Visualization techniques also may be used to imagine a peaceful scene such as ocean waves lapping on the beach to create relaxation.

Meditation & self-hypnosis are passive relaxation techniques that can be used to create relaxation. Four elements are used in meditation: a quiet environment, a point of focus like a neutral word that can help with concentration, a passive, accepting attitude & a comfortable position.

Meditation once or twice a day for 10-20 minutes each time can bring rapid relief from chronic stress & also increase a person's ability to tolerate stress.

Learning ways to help yourself relax can have many benefits, perhaps the most important of which is developing a feeling of confidence about facing the everyday challenges of life, including helping to:

- Reduce unhealthy stress & anxiety
- Increase resistance to illness & disease
- Lower blood pressure
- Reduce the heart rate
- Relieve muscle tension
- Cope with medical problems, such as chronic pain or diabetes
- Prevent, manage & cope with migraine headaches
- Cope with extremely stressful or painful situations, such as childbirth.

Relaxation techniques are also considered very safe with delightful lack of side effects, although there have been very rare and unusual cases where people have actually raised their levels of anxiety rather than lowered them after using the techniques because of a heightened awareness of body sensations. Even more rare are the reports of pain, heart palpitations, muscle twitching, and crying spells.

## **Acupuncture Treatment For Migraines**

For most people in the west, the entire concept of willingly sticking needles into your body is a bit suspect. In fact, most people probably have to reach a certain point of no return to even consider the very idea of acupuncture. Unfortunately, most migraine sufferers will no doubt reach that point of return at some point.

Migraines headache pain can be unbearable to the point of excruciating and almost anyone who has ever suffered more than one migraine has reached a level of pain at which they would welcome a little pinprick if it meant a cessation of their migraine agony.

But does acupuncture actually relieve migraine symptoms?

Although several studies have concluded that acupuncture is an effective migraine prevention strategy, nothing conclusive has yet been determined, though much research is available to suggest that it is effective for managing mild to moderate migraine attacks. How acupuncture treatment typically works is by inserting fine needles specific points on the body, which are then gently manipulated with the needles.

This supposedly increases blood flow in the tissues. This blood flow is called the axon reflex. It works by dilating the blood vessels around the needle area, allowing for an increase circulation where blood flow had previously been poor. This process is called stagnation and is considered to be a very good response for most chronic conditions for which one would seek acupuncture treatment, including migraine prevention.

This is not the only method of using acupuncture to treat migraines, however. Because the pain experienced during a migraine is associated with the dilation of cranial blood vessels, prompting the reaction described above by inserting needles into the head and neck might not be the best thing to do during a migraine episode. In fact, it could worsen the pain and bring on nausea. For that reason, some acupuncture practitioners try to reduce the amount of movement in the blood vessels in the head and neck during a migraine attack by restricting the acupuncture points to those on the arms and legs.

To avoid unnecessary dilation of the cranial vessels, therefore, the head and neck areas are rarely stimulated. In addition, rather than treating the patient in a prone position as would normally be done, this method of treatment is usually done with the patient sitting up because the blood vessels are can be better controlled when in a sitting position. This greatly reduces the possibility of undesired dilation of the blood vessels following acupuncture. Under some circumstances, a high frequency electrical current is sometimes connected to the acupuncture needles in order to help with constricting of vessels.

Of course, like most other treatments for migraine pain, acupuncture doesn't come without its own side effects. Unfortunately, when it comes to acupuncture, it's less a question of side effects and more a question of side injuries. Unlike the most common side effects of medication—nausea, vomiting, swelling, hives—when acupuncture goes bad it can be life threatening. The most common serious injury associated with acupuncture involves the accidental puncture of the lung, which often results in a partial collapse of the lung.

In addition, one should also be aware of the dangers of infection. The most common infection associated with acupuncture treatments is viral hepatitis, which can potentially develop into a serious infection of the liver. Other possible side effects include bacterial infections developing locally at the site of needle insertion in the skin and elsewhere in the body. Generally, side effects seem to relate to poor hygiene and training of the acupuncturist so make sure you see some qualifications of your acupuncturist and get some recommendations beforehand if possible.

Throwing a money wrench into the whole idea, unfortunately, was a report sponsored by the Journal of the American Medical Association that claimed to find no available evidenced supporting the contention that acupuncture possesses any effectiveness in treating migraines. Until other studies conclusively reach the same opinion, however, the decision on whether to seek treatment by sticking needles into your body remains between you and your pain threshold.

## **Massage Therapy**

When it comes to migraines, a little massage never hurt. But then again, a little massage never hurt whether you suffer from migraines or not. Seriously though, massage therapy has proven quite helpful in relieving headache pain. In general, you don't want to rely solely upon massage as the method for relief from your madness, but instead use it in conjunction with other therapies as well as medication and changes in your lifestyle.

How can massage help with migraines? Migraine sufferers generally suffer from stiff, tender muscles in the back of the head, neck, and shoulders. The pressure against these points in the muscle can be the cause of severe pain, pain that is akin to migraine pain. These pressure points are known as trigger points. By massaging the trigger points, one can effectively reduce the pain and tightness in the muscles, which decreases discomfort in some sufferers. Massage therapy is a terrific method for reducing tension in the muscles, not to mention for reducing stress. When beginning a massage program it is best to begin with one or two sessions a week for about a month and a half.

Several studies have been done to determine whether massage therapy really helps relieve migraine pain. The results of these studies have determined that massage therapy at the very least helps migraine sufferers sleep better and at best actually does manage to lessen headache pain. The following are the most helpful methods of massage therapy yet found to deal with migraine headaches.

**Reflexology:** General massage therapy based upon the pressure and massage of points not on the head, but rather the soles of the feet. Reflexology isn't so much a therapy as an art; a massage art used to relieve stress and pain throughout the body. The conceptual plan is based on the idea of zones in the feet that correspond to all areas of the body. By manipulating these zones, therapists hope to benefit the corresponding areas throughout the rest of your body.

**Craniosacral therapy:** Simply lie back and enjoy the sensations of your massage therapist softly massaging your skull and scalp. This method soothes the nerves and lessens the waves of pain that those nerves send, which is the cause of the actual pain.

**Deep-tissue massage therapy:** A deep-tissue massage is intended to help with the improvement of circulation while reducing tension within the muscles by focusing on specific body areas thought to relieve pain and stress when manipulated. The deep tissue part of deep tissue massage is in reference to how the therapists uses deep finger pressure and deliberate stroking of the areas of the body that are suffering from muscle tension or aches.

**Neuromuscular massage:** This therapy, which is also known as trigger-point therapy, is a muscle relaxing treatment that applies moderate pressure to your body's trigger points (spots in a muscle that, when stimulated by pressure or touch, are painful). Some believe that it can reduce nerve compression and relieve pain in tense or overworked muscles.

**Acupressure:** Look again, that's accuPRESSURE, not acuPUNCTURE! Acupressure techniques are employed by applying pressure from the tips of the finger to points on your head, not sticking needles into your skull. The theory is that acupressure helps headache sufferers by calming muscle tension and enhancing blood circulation. You can actually do acupressure on yourself simply by applying moderate and constant fingertip pressure with just two fingers for five minutes tops. The best method is to use one hand on top of your head and the other to apply pressure between your eyes.

When engaging in massage therapy, be aware that even the lightest, gentlest pressure from the most qualified therapist can cause at least mild discomfort, but should the pain become unbearable immediately instruct the therapist to quit massaging. To find a qualified therapist where you live, if your town features a school of massage therapy you can check with them and they will provide you with names and certification information.

## **Migraines and Exercise**

There are so many good reasons to begin an exercise program that you really don't even need one more. Nevertheless, you are about to read one more: Exercise can help in the treatment of migraines.

Studies have found overwhelming evidence to support the idea that just moderate aerobic exercise helps to reduce not only the intensity, but also the frequency and even the duration of migraine headaches in those who experience migraines without aura.

Migraine headaches come in two varieties. Most sufferers experience severe headaches along with nausea and a heightened sensitivity to both light and sound. When the headache is accompanied by bizarre visual disturbances or unusual head sensations this is known as migraine headache with aura. Aura usually occurs before any actual head pain in a migraine episode.

Most migraine sufferers, however, do not experience these extreme sensations and instead experience what is known as migraine without aura. Rapid changes in the flow of blood to the head is believed to be the cause of the migraine. The aura is theorized to be associated with constriction of blood vessels in the head, and when the vessels then widen again the result is head pain, nausea, and sensitivity to light and sound.

Studies have found that aerobic exercise can be helpful in migraine management, although exercising during the migraine episode itself can actually worsen the problem. One study involving patients with a history of migraines who participated in an aerobic exercise program revealed that they had experienced fewer migraines that were also of lessened intensity and shorter duration than did those with a history of migraines who did not exercise. Increased levels of endorphins and other chemicals in the body are thought to be behind the reduction of the episodes and the mitigation of the symptoms. Endorphins are chemicals released inside the body that are associated with reducing pain.

Another study looked at people who had experienced migraines with aura chronically and were enrolled in an exercise program. These people were studied after they had ceased their intake of all anti-migraine medications that they had been using previous to the study and began the exercise program after six weeks. The session involved a ten-minute warm-up followed by twenty minutes of aerobic exercise performed at a moderate rate, followed by a ten minute long cooling off session.

Participants in this study exercised three times a week for six weeks, however they did not exercise during migraine headaches. Their levels of endorphin were measured both before and after the first exercise session and then again at the end of the study. In the last four weeks of the study, those who had participated in this study reported significantly reduced frequency of their migraines, along with reductions both intensity and duration. Endorphin levels had increased after exercise in all of the participants, but interestingly it was those participants who began with the lower endorphin levels who experienced greater increases in endorphins after exercise.

The results of these studies indicate what most people probably already knew: that exercise is good for you even if you have migraines. When it comes to aerobic exercises, especially when done moderately, you have a tremendous number of choices. Simply going for a walk can also help in relaxing you if you live in an area where going for a walk takes you away from traffic and dogs and mean little kids. Or you could try biking in order to better escape the dogs and kids, but you still have to deal with the traffic.

On the other hand, you may wish to go the treadmill route. They aren't nearly as expensive as they used to be and the cost would be well worth it if the result is avoiding headaches for the rest of your life.

Probably the best bet is to either shell out the dough for a health club membership or, better yet, buy one of those recumbent bikes. These are great because you can sit back and sort of relax, watch your favorite TV show or even play a video while getting your exercise, knocking off some pounds and may even beating your migraines.

## **Sex and Migraines**

Funny thing about sex. It can be incredibly positive and incredibly negative. The same goes for sex and migraines. There does seem to be some sort of link between sex and migraines, but it is still unclear exactly what that link is.

Sexually triggered headaches have been reported by people engaging in all kinds of sex acts, from masturbation to intercourse, with or without orgasm. Some headaches even seem to have been caused more by the position people got themselves into than the actual sex act in which they were engaging. Although they do occur, sexually triggered headaches appear to be rather rare, affecting roughly one out of every 350 headaches or so. Even so, the problem is widespread and has a major lifestyle effect on those who get them.

When sexual activity causes migraine attacks its called coital cephalgia, exertional headache, or effort Migraine. As the names suggest, these headaches may be merely exertional headaches brought about by sex or any other strenuous activities. They may or may not be linked to orgasm or sexual arousal. Coital headaches are far more common among males than females and often last a day or more. Headaches or Migraine attacks induced by sexual activity may strike prior to, at the time of, or following orgasm.

Headaches instigated by sexual activity have been divided into three patterns. Sudden onset applies to almost three-quarters of them, beginning either right before, during, or immediately after orgasm. This head is normally quite severe and can either build slowly or suddenly explode inside your head. The subacute pattern applies to only one-quarter of instances and begins before orgasm with intensity building until orgasm. The pain associated with this type is a dull ache. It is occasionally accompanied by nausea and vomiting. The least common pattern is the postdural headache in which the pain is located the lower back of the head and increases upon standing erect. It is often accompanied by nausea and vomiting.

If coital headaches become chronic it s advised that you take migraine medication. Be sure to check with a physician if you experience an explosive headache brought on by exertion. It may be more than a headache and could lead to an aneurysm.

However, all is not bad news when it comes to sex and migraines. Sexual activity can actually be used as treatment for migraines. A study conducted at the Headache Clinic of Southern Illinois University found that some women actually were able to relieve their migraine headache pain through achieving orgasm. While the level of the relief varied, those who obtained complete relief represented the highest percentage. In comparison to medications, orgasm as a method of relieving migraine is less effective, but provides relief much quicker when it does so. This particular study did not involve men, but there exists plenty of other evidence suggesting that sex may work to relieve migraines in males as well.

Other studies have found that sexual activity and orgasm triggers an endorphin rush in the brain. This chemical reaction works as sort of a natural analgesic to block pain. In regard to how sex works in conjunction with migraines, serotonin is released during orgasm, causing a constriction of the dilated blood vessels in the brain that were causing the migraine. The increased endorphin usually last anywhere from one to three hours.

Ultimately, then, the question of whether sex is good or bad for headaches is left unanswered. For some people sexual activity must be considered a trigger, while for others a method of treatment. Once again when it comes to migraines, there is no concrete answer and it seems as though more questions are raised than answered. The key is to explore both sides of the issue and not be inhibited by embarrassment. If sex does seem to cause your headaches, be honest with your partner and your doctor. On the other hand, don't be afraid to try out sex as pathway toward relief. Even if it doesn't work, it's worth the old college try.

## **Biofeedback and Migraines**

One method of alternative treatment for migraines that is increasing in popularity is biofeedback. Biofeedback is basically a way for a person to learn control over body a function. Functions that include muscle tension and even levels of hormones in the blood have a direct influence upon headaches. By using biofeedback techniques, information concerning these functions are supplied to the person undergoing the technique.

A biofeedback session begins with a technician attaching your body via wires to a computer that will monitor such things as heart rate, brain waves, pulse, muscle activities, perspiration and skin temperature. The readings of these monitors will be presented as sounds or as video images. There are basically two goals involved in biofeedback. Making yourself more attuned with how you feel when your body is undergoing a variety of physical changes, for instance, changes in blood pressure, and secondly, teaching you how to adjust your physical responses so that you can effectively avoid problems associated with them, such as migraines.

The biofeedback sessions typically last from thirty to sixty minutes, whereas the actual number of sessions you will need depend greatly upon your condition as well as the progress you make. Regardless of how well you respond, it is best not to exceed fifteen sessions. The final step involved in biofeedback technique is fully understanding what you have learned and then effectively applying it to you lifestyle without the benefit of the biofeedback machines.

Not all biofeedback is alike. Indeed there are a variety of methods and the one you choose will be dependent upon your individual needs.

**Electromyogram (EMG).** An EMG uses electrodes or other types of sensors to measure muscle tension. By alerting you to muscle tension, you can learn to recognize the feeling early on and try to control the tension right away. EMG is mainly used to promote the relaxation of those muscles involved in backaches, headaches, neck pain and grinding your teeth. An EMG may be used to treat some illnesses whose symptoms tend to worsen under stress, such as asthma and ulcers.

**Temperature biofeedback.** Sensors attached to your fingers or feet measure your skin temperature. Because your temperature often drops when you're under stress, a low reading can prompt you to begin relaxation techniques. Temperature biofeedback can help treat certain circulatory disorders, such as Reynaud's disease, or reduce the frequency of migraines.

**Galvanic skin response training.** Sensors measure the activity of your sweat glands and the amount of perspiration on your skin, alerting you to anxiety. This information can be useful in treating emotional disorders such as phobias, anxiety and stuttering.

**Electroencephalogram (EEG).** An EEG monitors the activity of brain waves linked to different mental states, such as wakefulness, relaxation, calmness, light sleep and deep sleep.

Biofeedback has proven an effective method for many seeking alternative, non-traditional, non-medicated relief from migraine. There are several appealing factors at play in choosing to undergo biofeedback. For one thing, if successful, you reduce and possibly eliminate your dependence upon drugs. For those who don't respond to medication, it potentially can help your situation significantly. Once you begin biofeedback you may get the extra-added appeal of feeling as if you have genuine control over your disease. And, last but hardly least, it could seriously curtail your medical expenses.

However, like all other treatments, there are some drawbacks. For instance, if you are one of those anal-retentive types who have to know how something works instead on relying on the fact that it does work, you should know that experts aren't completely certain of the why when it comes to biofeedback. Many people who are consistently successful at using it to fend of a variety of health problems are totally ignorant of how they do it; all they can tell you is that their symptoms have subsided with the help of this technique where they didn't subside with any other.

Although biofeedback is considered to one of the safer methods of migraine treatment, it is still recommended that you discuss it with a doctor who is knowledgeable about the technique. You should also be aware that biofeedback has been known to interfere with the use of some medications, such as insulin.

### **Treating Migraines with Homeopathy**

Treating migraine through homeopathy is becoming a very popular alternative to medicine-based treatments. Homeopathy is basically a method or theory of healing that attempts to stimulate the body into healing itself by using natural remedies. The following are the power list of best remedies for treating your migraine homeopathically.

**Belladonna** — Extracted from nightshade, this one is great reducing fever as well as treating those sudden throbbing headaches that tend to worsen with motion and light, but are partially relieved by pressure, standing, sitting, or leaning backwards.

**Bryonia** — for headaches with a steady, sharp pain in the forehead that may radiate to the back of the head; these types of headaches worsen with movement and light touch, but improve with firm pressure; this remedy is most appropriate for individuals who are irritable and may also experience nausea, vomiting, and constipation

**Gelsemium** — for pain that extends around the head and feels like a tight band of constriction; pain usually originates in the back of the head and may be relieved following urination; this remedy is most appropriate for individuals who feel extremely weak and have difficulty keeping their eyes open.

**Ignatia** — for pain that may be described as a feeling of something being driven into the skull; these types of headaches tend to be triggered by emotion, including grief or anxiety, and the treatment is appropriate for both children and adults.

**Iris versicolor** — for periodic migraines that begin with blurred vision, especially after eating sweets; pain usually occurs on one side of the head and may be partially relieved by gentle movement and/or fresh air

**Kali bichromicum** — for aching and pressing pains on the forehead (particularly between and behind the eyes); may be accompanied by sinus congestion or nausea and vomiting; this remedy is most appropriate for individuals who prefer to lie down in a dark room and who experience relief from warmth and eating.

**Lachesis** — Get its bite by being extracted from the poison of the Bushmaster snake. Best for migraines on the left side of the head that are typically worse in the mornings and before menstruation; this type of headache is aggravated by warmth and sunlight and relieved by open air and firm pressure.

**Natrum muriaticum** — one of the most common remedies used for migraine headaches, particularly those that are described as "hammers beating the head;" pain is relieved when the individual is lying down, alone, in a quiet dark room; these migraines may be associated with either menstruation or a grieving experience and are worse in the middle of the day; this remedy is most appropriate for children who look pale and feel nauseated, nervous, and emotional.

**Nux vomica** — for headaches that are described as a "nail being driving into the head;" often accompanied by nausea and/or dizziness; this remedy is most appropriate for individuals who are constipated and irritable.

**Sanguinaria** — for right-sided headaches that begin in the neck and move upwards, recur in a predictable pattern (such as every seven days), and are accompanied by nausea and vomiting; pain is aggravated by motion, light or sun exposure, odors, and noise; this remedy is appropriate for children who may have a craving for spicy or acidic foods, despite having a general aversion to eating due to the headache.

**Sepia** — for migraines that are accompanied by nausea and are relieved when the individual is lying down; light and movement tend to worsen symptoms; this remedy is most appropriate for individuals who are moody and don't like being alone, but worry about being with others.

**Pulsatilla** — for headaches triggered by eating rich, fatty foods, particularly ice cream; pain tends to move but may be concentrated in the forehead or on one side of the head; may be accompanied by digestive problems or occur around the time of menstruation; children for whom this remedy is appropriate often develop these symptoms while at school.

**Spigelia** — for migraines described as a stinging, burning, or throbbing pain, often on the left side of the head; symptoms tend to worsen with exposure to cold weather and with motion, but are temporarily relieved by cold compresses and when the individual is lying on the right side with the head propped up.

## **Using Botox and Medicines Designed for Other Ailments in Treating Migraines**

### **Can Botox help prevent migraines?**

Botox (botulinum toxin) is a purified protein that belongs to a class of compounds known as neurotoxins that initially approved the US Food & Drug Administration to treat eye muscle disorders known as strabismus and blepharospasm. Since then, obviously, its use has extended to other, more cosmetic uses.

Botox weakens or paralyzes (depending on dose) muscles by preventing the release of acetylcholine, a signal that the nerves need to cause muscle contraction. This is the same substance that is produced in spoiled food and causes the illness known as botulism. However, in medical use, the Botox is injected directly into the muscles involved rather than absorbed into the bloodstream, and the doses used are much less than those that cause botulism.

The jury is still out on whether Botox will ever make it into the realm of medical treatment that patients naturally turn to for migraine relief, but if you think that Botox is the only treatment found to help with migraine that was originally created for treatment for another ailment, take a look at this list. Everything on it has been used in migraine relief and everything on it was originally designed for use against something else.

### **Anti-Hypertensives (Blood Pressure Meds) Alpha-2 Agonists:**

- Clonidine, aka Catapres
- Guanfacine, aka Tenex

### **ACE Inhibitors:**

- Benazepril, aka Lotensin
- Captopril, aka Capoten
- Enalapril, aka Vasotec
- Fosinopril, aka Monopril
- Lisinopril, aka Zestril, Prinivil
- Moexipril, aka Univasc
- Perindopril, aka Aceon
- Quinapril, aka Accupril
- Ramipril, aka Altace
- Trandolapril, aka Mavik
- Angiotensin II Inhibitors:

- Candesartan, aka Atacand
- Eprosartan, aka Teveten
- Irbesartan, aka Avapro
- Losartan, aka Cozaar
- Olmesartan, aka Benicar
- Telmisartan, aka Midcardis
- Valsartan, aka Diovan

#### **Beta Blockers:**

- Acebutolol, aka Secral
- Atenolol, aka Tenormin
- Betaxolol, aka Kerlone
- Bisoprolol, aka Zebeta, Emconcor
- Cartelol, aka Cartrol
- Labetalol, aka Normodyne, Trandate
- Metoprolol, aka Lopressor
- Nadolol, aka Corgard
- Penbutolol aka Levatol
- Pindolol, aka Visken, Syn-Pindolol
- Propranolol, aka Inderal
- Timolol, aka Blocadren

#### **Calcium Channel Blockers:**

- Amlodipine, aka Norvasc
- Bepridil, aka Vasacor
- Diltiazem, aka Cardizem, Tiazac
- Felodipine, aka Plendil
- Flunarizine, aka Sibelium (Canada)
- Isradipine, aka DynaCirc
- Nicardipine, aka Cardene
- Nifedipine, aka Adalat, Procardia
- Nimodipine, aka Nimotop
- Nisoldipine, aka Sular
- Verapamil, aka Calan, Verelan, Isoptin

#### **Other Antihypertensives:**

- Guanfacine, aka Tenex
- Mirtazapine, aka Remeron

#### **Antihistamines:**

- Cyproheptadine, aka Periactin
- Pizotifen, aka Sandomigran (UK)

#### **Antidepressants - Tricyclic Antidepressants (TCAs):**

- Amitriptyline, aka Elavil (discontinued), Endep
- Amoxapine, aka Asendin
- Clomipramine, aka, Anafranil
- Desipramine, aka Norpramin
- Doxepin, aka Sinequan
- Imipramine, aka Norfranil, Tofranil
- Nortriptyline, aka Pamelor, Aventyl
- Protriptyline, aka Vivactil
- Trimipramine, aka Surmontil

**MAOI Antidepressants:**

- Isocarboxazid, aka Marplan
- Phenelzine, aka Nardil
- Tranylcypromine, aka Parnate

**Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs):**

- Citalopram, aka Celexa
- Escitalopram oxalate, aka Lexapro
- Fluoxetine, aka Prozac
- Fluvoxamine, aka Luvox
- Paroxetine, aka Paxil
- Sertraline, aka Zoloft

**Selective serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SSNRIs):**

- Duloxetine hydrochloride, aka Cymbalta

**Other Antidepressants:**

- Bupropion, aka Wellbutrin, Zyban
- Mirtazepine, aka Remeron
- Trazodone, aka Desyrel
- Venlafaxine, aka Effexor, Effexor XR

**Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder Meds Selective Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitor:**

- Atomoxetine HCl, aka Strattera

**Arthritis Meds Cox-2 Enzyme Inhibitors:**

- Celecoxib, aka Celebrex

**Neuronal Stabilizing Agents (Anti-Seizure Meds)**

- Carbamazepine, aka Tegretol
- Clonazepam, Klonopin
- Clorazepate, aka Tranxene
- Divalproex, aka Depakote
- Gabapentin, aka Neurontin
- Levetiracetam, Keppra
- Lamotrigine, aka Lamictal
- Oxcarbazepine, Trileptal
- Tiagabine, aka Gabitril
- Topiramate, aka Topamax
- Valproate Sodium, aka Depacon
- Zonisamide, aka Zonegran

#### **Ergot Alkaloid:**

- Methylergonovine, aka Methergine (the only ergot used as a preventive)

#### **Leukotriene Blockers:**

- Montelukast, aka Singulair
- Zafirlukast, aka Accolate
- Zileuton, aka Zyflo

#### **Other:**

- Baclofen, aka Lioresal
- Botulinum Toxin Type A, aka Botox

#### **Dietary Supplements:**

- Coenzyme Q10
- Feverfew
- Butterbur, aka Petadolex
- Magnesium
- Vitamin B2
- 5-HTP (Check carefully with doctor because of interactions with meds including triptans)
- Lecithin

### **Treating Migraines in Children**

If your child has either frequent or severe headaches that is cause enough to take him to a doctor. Recurrent headaches can be a sign of something very serious in children. Be prepared when you visit the doctor: know your family's medical history, be able to give all the details concerning the headache.

If the child is old enough to answer, the doctor will probably want to specifically question the child. Don't be surprised or offended if the doctor wishes to question the child alone, he just wants to hear her describe the symptoms on her own.

It's quite possible the doctor will instruct or request that you begin keeping a headache journal, which is simply a diary in which you keep track of such things as: how often the child has the headaches, how bad the headaches are, how long the headaches last, what medications were given and whether or not they helped, and anything that makes the headaches begin, get worse, or get better. Once important information about the headaches has been gathered, the doctor may want to do a complete physical exam.

After the exam is complete, often the doctor may want to conduct blood tests, cranial computed tomography, or a magnetic resonance imaging study. For migraine and tension-type headaches, treatment might begin with nothing more complicated than improving sleep and nutrition habits. Headache triggers, if they have been identified, will be recommended to be avoided.

For many kids, simple changes in lifestyle often produce a huge difference in how often they suffer from headaches, how bad the pain is and how long the headaches last. If a drug treatment thought best, doctors often first recommend acetaminophen for headaches in children. If the pain doesn't stop with this treatment, let the doctor know immediately and make sure you never give more medicine to a child than is recommended. Even though acetaminophen is available without a prescription, it can still be dangerous to a child if too much is given. In addition, there other medications that the doctor recommend.

The more information about your child's condition that you can provide to the physician, the easier it will be for the doctor to find the best medication for that child. Even with the best information, be prepared to undergo several trials before determining the most effective medication because each child reacts differently to medications. The medication may also be prescribed for the child's nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, if these symptoms are present. Preventive treatments may be prescribed by a doctor if the child's headaches are severe or if they occur with great frequency.

Many times kids and teenagers who have very bad headaches, as well as their parents make the decision not to use preventive treatments because they don't want t to have take medicine every single day. The choice in this matter must be made by each child and his parents based on how difficult it may be for the child to cope with the headaches and how well medications work if taken after the headaches start. Just be aware that there are many preventive medications that can be tried.

Some non-drug treatments, like biofeedback and relaxation therapies, can be helpful, particularly in older children. These techniques must be learned by the child who will then practice and use them to cope with headache pain when it begins. If the techniques are practiced every day, they sometimes are even able to help prevent headaches from starting. Biofeedback machines measure electrical impulses or heat from the child's skin and show these measurements on a TV screen, a flashing light bulb, or a beeper. The feedback from their own

bodies can help the child to practice relaxation and make internal adjustments that help relieve the headache pain.

Because stress and anxiety play a part in many childhood headaches, it might be helpful for some children to see a mental health specialist, like a psychologist. Mental health specialists can help children with the relaxation techniques described above, and also help them deal with the stress and anxiety they are feeling.

## **Managing Migraines with Coexisting Medical Conditions**

Coexisting medical conditions are multiple illnesses or health conditions that can occur at the same time. These conditions may be either or they may be independent from each other. One person with migraine may suffer from depression, while another migraine sufferer may have asthma. Both asthma and depression are coexisting conditions with migraine

Diagnosing and acknowledging the presence of migraine and coexisting conditions are important steps toward developing a successful migraine management program. For the migraine sufferer, it is important to realize that there are two or more conditions that treatment and to work with the physician to develop a plan that is compatible with your lifestyle.

Diagnosing and appropriately managing migraine and coexisting medical conditions are also important because many health conditions can increase the frequency or severity of migraine attacks. If you can gain control over the coexisting condition, the migraine attacks may lessen in frequency or severity. In addition, some medicine can treat both conditions at the same time.

The particular characteristics coexisting conditions obviously will have an effect on the specific treatment plan designed for each migraine sufferer. Treating the headache and the coexisting condition at the same time may reduce the amount of time you miss from work and leisure activities. An individually designed headache treatment plan should reduce the pain experienced during the migraine as well as the disabilities associated with it, allowing the sufferer to return to normalcy at a quicker pace.

Acute treatment allows the migraine patient to be pain-free and able to return to normal functioning as quickly as possible, without having the migraine attack return. Some migraine sufferers require medication that will either prevents the migraine from beginning or will reduce the recurrence and force of attacks when they do occur. These medicines are used by patients who experience either frequent or disabling migraines.

Fortunately, these medications are often beneficial for treatment of coexisting conditions. The presence of coexisting conditions must be screened because some migraine medications may not be appropriate for use in the presence of certain coexisting conditions.

**Here are a few steps to begin - when launching a program:**

**Step 1:** Learn about each condition. The doctor and other health care providers should be able to answer questions and explain what migraine is and how the various medications can help.

**Step 2:** Follow the treatment plan that is agreed upon by you and the physician.

- Make sure that you understand specifically what you should do upon the onset of the next migraine.
- Take only those medications specifically prescribed by your doctor and in the exact dosage prescribed.
- Never take more of a medicine than recommended.
- Take acute medications as soon as it becomes obvious that the headache is really a migraine. Keep your medications with you at all times.
- If prescribed preventive therapies, follow the treatment plan EXACTLY as agreed upon. If the treatment plan is too hard to follow or is one you do not like, tell your doctor.

**Step 3:** Monitor headaches. One important part of migraine management is being able to recognize improvement or deterioration in migraine. A headache calendar will help identify headache patterns, triggers, and responses to treatments.

**Step 4:** Keep follow-up appointments. It is very important to make and keep all follow-up appointments with your healthcare provider. This will allow for modification of the treatment plan to make it most effective. It will also allow your healthcare provider to monitor side effects.

Other important tips to remember...

- Use the medications as prescribed by your doctor.
- Acute medication may not work every time. Taking medications early in the course of the attack will increase the chances that the medication will work.
- Learn when to use and how to use prescribed rescue medications.
- Preventive medication may take weeks or months to show improvement.
- Call the doctor if side effects from medications occur.
- Record headache activity on a daily basis using a headache calendar.
- Make and keep follow-up appointments with the doctor.

### **Migraine Advice from Sufferers Around the World**

Let's face facts, sometimes medicine doesn't work. Sometimes the top alternative treatments don't work. Sometimes crazy things that you never in a million years thought would work—work!

Mention the word migraine or the word headache in a room with more than two people and you are almost guaranteed of receiving free advice. There's an almost limitless amount of possible treatments that you may or may not want to try. Most are harmless enough that it really wouldn't hurt to go ahead and give it a shot. So next time you've got a real brain popping

migraine and nothing works maybe you should see if one of these will do the trick. It may just turn out to be the magic pill you've been looking for all your life.

One common method that seems to be circulating involves drinking a lot of water. Not just a few glasses, mind you, but a truly titanic amount of water. For some people, it seems the more water you try the better. Maybe this is just a case of transference. You know, your bladder starts hurting so much from expanding under the weight of that liquid that you forget all about your head hurting. Other suggestions are that the migraines are triggered by dehydration and the water fixes the problem in a jiffy.

Others swear by an alternative liquid treatment. Not water, but Benadryl. This probably works by making you so sleepy that you forget all about the headache. Obviously, this is not recommended if you are pregnant. Not to mention that some people suffer from a reverse reaction to Benadryl and get all hyper and probably will suffer a reverse reaction in regard to headache by making it worse. This one, as with all involving medicine, requires caution.

Massage, of course, is a frequently tried alternative method, but it takes time and money and usually isn't exactly convenient as far as helping out right when the headache attacks. But self-massage is easily done and many, many migraine sufferers turn to it without even realizing. The preferred method seems to be using the fingertips and gently rubbing the temples, the tips of the ears or the back of the head. Of course, many professional massage therapists.

Draw. Just because you aren't exactly Van Gogh doesn't matter. Art therapy works wonders and nobody can even come close to explaining why. Maybe it's just the physical activity, maybe it's the creative drive coming to the surface and driving away all that nasty pressure taking place inside the cranial vessels. It's really an amazing thing to watch. People barely able to keep their eyes open have been known to pick up a pen or piece of charcoal and begin applying it to paper and within a half hour their migraine headache symptoms begin to subside. Oddly enough, this therapy has proven more effective in those who claim to have no artistic talent than those who do; actual artists actually seem to be affected the least.

Play a video game. This is probably not the best idea for those whose migraines tend to be triggered by light or noise. If your trigger doesn't seem related to sensitivity to light or noise, then give this a try. It seems to work best if you play a game that doesn't require a significant amount of strategy; either shoot to kill or sports-related games tend to have the best results. It is assumed that sports games work through their ability to a migraine sufferer focused on the outcome of actually winning a game that can be won in the time it takes have a migraine. By focusing on the game and having a goal that can be met, the stress that is related to migraines seems to be eased.

And finally, for the minority of migraines sufferers who are male, there is one last suggestion. Of course, there are disadvantages to this approach in that you need the assistance of a willing participant, but those who try it swear by it. (And when you find out what it is, you'll understand why). Apparently, being on the receiving end of a certain type of sexual practice associated with France has been known to relieve more than just a few migraines. And even if it doesn't, well, this one is definitely worth giving the old college try.

## **Could There be Any Worse Advice for Treating a Migraine Than This?**

You've read the good advice, or at least the advice that has been known to work. But how many times have you gotten advice on how to treat a migraine that, well, gave you a migraine? Some advice making the rounds almost sounds like jokes, or at least some kind of fiction. But the following are actual migraine treatments that people like you and me have received from friends, family, co-workers and strangers.

A man who had been suffering headaches for decades went to see a headache specialist in the 60s and was advised to start dating younger women. Not just younger women, mind you, but younger women of the kind that you don't meet in bars. Nice younger women. Okay, well maybe that shouldn't quite qualify as one of the worst pieces of migraine advice of all time. It's certainly not as bad as:

Buy a razor and dig out that nerve bundle over your eye that's causing all your freaking pain! Yeah, that would definitely qualify as bad advice. In the first place it would hurt like you know what. In the second place, it would probably make your head hurt worse, not make it feel better.

This next one is entertaining because of the exactitude of its requirements, but it could possibly pan out in the future to have some merit. Take a five ounce magnet in your left hand and a three ounce magnet in your right hand and alternatively rotate them exactly three inches away from your skull for five minutes.

To be honest, magnets have been used in scientific studies to treat various illnesses and there are subcultures out there that turn to magnetic power as a general cure-all for just about anything. To say that magnets could have no effect at all migraines might be going too far, but it's still got to rank as bad advice to assume that the magnets have to be of different weights, held in different hands and only work when held at a specific distance for a specific amount of time. Then again, who knows?

There are several modes of thought that might find this next one actually makes sense. Those who are completely convinced that all migraine pain is in your head and that medicine can't work because it's not accomplishing anything anyway might just see past the idiocy of this next one. Quit your medication cold turkey, stiff it out for a few weeks and desensitize your head. Sure. And maybe if angina sufferers just desensitize their hearts they won't die from a heart attack.

Sit in a bathtub filled with ice for five minutes then take a hot shower until all the ice has melted away. Where to begin on this one? In the first place, sitting in a tub billed with ice may take your attention away from the headache, but only because you are transferring your attention to the pain caused by frostbite. It's almost certainly not a good idea to sit that long in ice. Next comes the question why does the shower have to last until the ice melts? Is there some magic in the time it takes for hot water to melt away all that ice. This one goes beyond merely bad advice straight to insane. It's almost impossible to imagine how this cure could work.

Quit your job and sell Amway. This one probably came from a top level Amway distributor trying to add to his pyramid.

Migraines are caused by severe resentment of someone. If you can overcome the resentment, you will get rid of your migraines. There are two problems with this treatment. One, resentment has nothing to do with migraines and two, getting rid of migraines is probably easier than overcoming resentment.

A lot of crazy advice over the years about a lot of different things has gradually turned into accepted methods of treatment. After all, who would ever have thought that bread mold could cure disease? Still, it's probably not the best idea in the world to take a razor to your head.

That thing about dating younger women still doesn't sound too bad, though.

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