

## Migraines – Helpful Solutions

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I will never forget the painful expression on the face of my aunt Stella as she burrowed her head deep into the pillow trying to cope with the excruciating pain of a migraine. This was the first time I had seen a migraine sufferer face to face. It was the day before her son's wedding, and I was not sure if she would be able to cope the following day while suffering such agony. Was it something she ate, the stress of the upcoming event, or perhaps it was thoughts of "losing" her only child that provoked hormonal fluctuations to cause her migraine? Triggers precipitating a particular episode of a migraine may vary widely, even within the same individual. It may be difficult to recognize the trigger in a particular migraine, although common patterns appear to shed some light on this ever-increasing problem.

Women suffer from headaches more commonly than men. This trend increases from the onset of menstruation, peaks in mid 40's and then appears to decline following menopause. Migraines are a frustrating chronic illness that is widespread in our population. They range in intensity from an occasional annoyance to a life-threatening daily experience. Headaches are the number one pain problem and are one of the most common reasons why patients visit doctors.

Typically, migraine sufferers are offered drugs such as acetaminophen, codeine, barbiturates, and ergotamine in an attempt to control their pain. However, this band-aid approach does not remove the cause of the migraine, but may in fact cause headaches to recur on a rebound basis as these drugs leave the nervous system. This is a similar effect to that of "curing" a coffee drinker's headache by giving him or her coffee to stop a headache caused by caffeine withdrawal.

Migraines are not caused by dilation and constriction of blood vessels; this is a secondary response due to an underlying cause. In fact, the majority of migraine sufferers eventually get a stroke since the cause of the problem has not been addressed over a prolonged period of time. Symptoms persist in calling for attention, but often are only palliated with painkillers. Many factors may trigger or aggravate a migraine attack. Quite frequently it may be due to physical activity, or menstruation, alcohol consumption (red wine in particular), too little or too much sleep, a missed meal, a change in weather, or certain foods. Migraine headaches are a chronic, complex, and multi-factorial

condition that involves social, genetic, physiological and psychological components. Although simply stated - typically, they result from retained toxins in the body or tissue irritants within the central nervous system that may express along different or even a combination of anatomical systems that would include the following:

**Endocrine System** - the hormonal imbalance leading to estrogen dominance, hypothyroidism, hyper-insulinemia and possibly other expressions that are affected by hormones. Estrogen levels are a key factor in the increased prevalence of migraine in women. Estrogen dominance or progesterone deficiency prior to menstruation is a common migraine trigger; estrogen administration in oral contraceptives and synthetic hormone replacement therapy (HRT) can trigger migraines; migraines typically decrease during the second and third trimesters of pregnancy when estradiol (good estrogen) levels are high; migraines are common immediately post-partum with the precipitous drop in estradiol levels; and migraines generally improve with physiologic menopause.

**Psychological influences** - People often think thoughts that are negative, frightening, angry, or even self demeaning. When normal/healthy people think these thoughts, nothing much happens. Individuals suffering from migraines have over-reactive hormone systems, while adrenalin and other hormones are released along with thought provoking cascade of negative emotions. A migraine sufferer may not feel anxious at all, they may claim to be relaxed but at the same time may be showing the physical symptoms of anxiety. These symptoms may be partly

resulting from various chemical processes such as the foods this person ate. However, they are also the result of thoughts. Psychological modulation of immune function is now a well-established phenomenon. The scientific evidence and the body of research are indisputable, explaining how the brain and body communicate with each