

Treating Migraines

The cause of migraines is not completely understood and various theories exist to explain this debilitating condition. A few current theories include vascular disturbances, neuron depression, and local inflammation. The main symptoms classifying migraines are intense head pain with or without visual auras, nausea, dizziness, and light sensitivity.

Epidemiological research by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) reported that nearly 3 million males and 9 million females within the US are chronic sufferers of migraine headaches. Migraines are most common in adolescents and young adults with 30% of migraine sufferers reporting their first attack occurring before age 10. Reports by the CDC indicate a dramatic decrease in migraine occurrences in adults over the age 64. Most sufferers, as much as 70%, report a family history of migraines.

Stress, allergies [1], muscular tightness, pregnancy, menstruation, alcohol ingestion and some diuretics can trigger migraines. However, if someone suddenly begins having migraines without a prior history of headaches, or if headaches intensify with every incident, consult your healthcare provider to rule out any potential life threatening diseases.

Treatment

- Acupuncture can treat the acute pain and also the underlying root cause of the episodes. Acupuncture is often applied along with soft-tissue therapy over the scalp and cervical region to provide rapid relief. Electro-acupuncture is also an effective tool that affects the neuro-muscular zones associated with migraine headaches. Herbal therapy can also be used to

- prevent the occurrence and severity of future attacks.
- Western treatments include analgesics and/or vasoconstrictors such as Ergotamine, Aspirin, and Ibuprofen. Pharmaceuticals are often prescribed with an antiemetic to improve the absorption of the migraine medication. Pharmaceutical medications are numerous, with new drugs being made available in many forms, including oral, inhalants, injections and suppositories. Consult your physician or pharmacist to determine which medication is most suitable for your condition.
 - For a migraine with mild symptoms, aspirin or Ibuprofen may be recommended along with the three S': Solitude, Silence, and Sleep. Ice packs can be applied to help with the pain and cause vasoconstriction of the blood vessels.

Prevention

Eating foods appropriate for the individual and engaging in regular exercise will promote cellular health and vascular functioning. Avoid tyramine-containing foods such as aged cheese, yogurt, beer, wine, liver and yeast. Observe your eating and activity patterns to identify habits that provoke migraine incidents.

Acupuncture, applied by a licensed practitioner, not only effectively treats the acute symptoms but also addresses the underlying imbalance within the body. Herbal therapies are an important component towards prevention of migraine headaches and are usually given in formulas containing more than 10 different herbs.

Commonly Recommended Supplements to

Prevent Migraines:

- Feverfew, *Tanacetum parthenium*, shown to reduce the severity, duration and frequency of migraine headaches and lead to improvements in blood vessel tone.
- Magnesium, which influences cerebral vascular tone, inhibition of vasospasm and platelet aggregation.
- Niacin (vitamin B3), which causes vasodilation.
- Ginko, *Ginko biloba*, is a platelet-aggregating factor (PAF) antagonist.

Self-medication with herbs or supplements is not recommended. Consult a qualified practitioner prior to taking herbal or dietary supplements for appropriate dosage and frequency.

[1] Most common allergenic foods associated with migraines being wheat, oranges, eggs, coffee and tea, chocolate, milk, beef, corn, white sugar, yeast, mushrooms and peas. Grant ECG. Food allergies and migraine. *Lancet* 1979; I:966-9.

Time to Stop Smoking

Important tips:

- Support Person: The decision to stop smoking can elicit uncomfortable emotions. Ask someone who is available to you in the next few weeks to act as a sounding board and provide encouragement when needed.
- Affirmation: An affirmation is positive statement repeated often to create desired changes in your life. Repeating the affirmation helps not only to remind you why you are no longer smoking but also imprints a new

image of health so that the body can then produce health. Examples: "I am a non-smoker. I make healthy choices in my life for myself and my family."

- **Set boundaries:** Establish agreements with other smokers to refrain from smoking in your presence. This includes your spouse. When possible, stay away from smokers until you feel more confident with your nonsmoking health status.
- **Drink water:** Research shows that dryness causes cravings. Sip water frequently throughout the day.
- **Refrain from drinking coffee:** Research shows that coffee causes cravings and dehydrates the body.
- **Food choices:** The best diet during the withdrawal period is a hypoglycemic diet which maintains constant blood sugar levels and avoids food cravings. Meals should consist of fresh fruits, vegetables, proteins, and complex carbohydrates in six meals a day. Try to avoid sweets and baked flour products. Candy upsets the blood sugar level, which can aggravate smoking-withdrawal symptoms. Sugar substitutes, such as NutraSweet, are sweeter than sugar and cause further sugar cravings.
- **Managing cravings:** Cravings feel like they will last forever but actually fade in two minutes. Plan what you will do during a craving. Examples: Take your herbs; repeat your affirmation; breathe deeply; walk to another place; work on a project or hobby; call your support person. If you're hungry have something to eat – it's not a cigarette craving.
- **Exercise Regularly:** Exercise relieves stress, eliminates boredom, increases circulation, strengthens the respiratory system, and promotes detoxification of tissues. If you do not already have an exercise program, start one today.
- **Hang in there!** It is only a short time before your body is free from nicotine and the cravings end.

Stop Smoking Checklist

1. Throw away all of your cigarettes – don't just hide them or give them away.
2. Change your daily routine. For example, if you usually smoke in the morning while reading the newspaper, try sitting in a different place, reading something different or listening to music. This doesn't mean don't do the things you enjoy, just do them at different times of the day to develop a new non-smoking routine.
3. Openly tell people that you have stopped smoking. This is an important affirmation and outward commitment to yourself and others that you are going to stop smoking. By telling your friends and family outright, they will be sensitive to your situation and openly support your decision. This proactive notice will also circumvent the uncomfortable situation of having to tell a smoker that you are trying to quit after they have already lit-up a cigarette.
4. Thoroughly clear away all signs of smoking. Clean your house, car, ashtrays, and all other areas or items that have had contact with tobacco smoke. Schedule an appointment to get your teeth cleaned and a manicure to remove nicotine stains.
5. Don't try and stop all of your "bad habits" at once. If you have multiple harmful habits, start by stopping the least difficult first then move on to another. For example, if you eat a lot of sweets or drink an excessive amount of coffee (both of which can contribute to cigarette cravings), start by eliminating or reducing the one you have the least desire for. Once you have overcome your smaller hurdles you will be more prepared and confident to overcome the more difficult ones.
6. If you smoke a cigarette don't give up or feel guilty. Everyone slips now and then, we are creatures of habit and prone to mistakes. Because you make a mistake and have a cigarette, don't feel like you lost everything and have to start from scratch. Realize your mistake, correct yourself, and move on. Once you have corrected

your mistake, think positively: "Well, at least I only had one cigarette today, normally I would have smoked a pack by now."

7. Don't tell others to stop smoking, instead focus on yourself. If you try to persuade others to stop smoking when they are not ready, it will only cause people to alienate you. Believe it or not, friends who smoke can be your biggest supporters. Maintaining these friendships can be very important, especially during a time when you need support and encouragement.
8. Take time to acknowledge your efforts. Take a moment to congratulate yourself and your accomplishments. This is not being boastful or arrogant; it's simply self-recognition.