

Migraine Headache: Disabling their Disability

Migraine headache is a distinct type of headache. The cause of migraine is still not completely understood. We know that changes occur in the blood vessels diameter, initially narrowing then widening when the headache starts. There are changes in brain activity and in the neurotransmitters that carry information from one nerve cell to the next. Migraine headaches seem to be caused in part by changes in the level of a body chemical called serotonin. Serotonin plays many roles in the body, and it can have an effect on the blood vessels. When serotonin levels are high, blood vessels constrict (shrink). When serotonin levels fall, the blood vessels dilate (swell). This swelling can cause pain or other problems.

Many things can affect the level of serotonin in your body, including your level of blood sugar, certain foods and changes in your estrogen level if you're a woman.

Medications have been developed that affect several of these abnormalities with successful resolution of the pain.

Pain is not the only characteristic of the migraine headache. There are many associated symptoms:

Intense throbbing or dull aching pain on one side of your head or both sides.

Nausea or vomiting

Changes in how you see, including blurred vision or blind spots

Being bothered by light, noise or odors

Feeling tired and/or confused

Stopped-up nose

Feeling cold or sweaty

Stiff or tender neck

Light-headedness

Tender scalp

These are severe headaches, often limited to one side. There is a certain progression that the migraine takes; starting with a slight loss of vision, then the appearance of bright spots and a zig-zag pattern. Vision will return slowly with the beginning of a dull, boring pain that spreads to the entire side of the head. In general, every person's migraine is different; it may follow the form above, have several symptoms absent, or have symptoms particular to just you.

Classic migraines start with a warning sign, called an aura. The aura often involves changes in the way you see. You may see flashing lights and colors. You may temporarily lose some of your vision, such as your side vision.

You may also feel a strange prickly or burning sensation, or have muscle weakness on one side of your body. You may have trouble communicating. You may also feel depressed, irritable and restless.

Auras last about 15 to 30 minutes. Head pain usually follows the aura, though sometimes the pain and aura overlap, or the pain never occurs. The head pain of classic migraines may occur on one side of your head or on both sides.

Common migraines don't start with an aura. Common migraines may start more slowly than classic migraines, last longer and interfere more with daily activities. The pain of common migraines may be on only one side of your head.

Ophthalmic migraines involve visual changes without headache.

Other characteristic symptoms that define migraine are visual changes such as flashing lights, shimmering images, visual distortions. Nausea and often vomiting is another common characteristic of migraine. If your terrible headache doesn't have nausea, vomiting, visual changes it may not be a migraine after all.

Migraines may last from 4 to 72 hours. They may happen only once or twice a year, or as often as daily.

What things may set off a migraine?

Certain things can set off migraines in some people. Foods that contain tyramine, sodium nitrite or phenylalanine (see the list below) can lead to migraines.

Foods that may trigger migraines

Aged, canned, cured or processed meat, including bologna, game, ham, herring, hot dogs, pepperoni and sausage

Aged cheese

Alcoholic beverages, especially red wine

Aspartame

Avocados

Beans, including pole, broad, lima, Italian, navy, pinto and garbanzo

Brewer's yeast, including fresh yeast coffee cake, donuts and sourdough bread

Caffeine (in excess)

Canned soup or bouillon cubes

Chocolate, cocoa and carob

Cultured dairy products, such as buttermilk and sour cream

Figs

Lentils

Meat tenderizer

Monosodium glutamate (MSG)

Nuts and peanut butter

Onions, except small amounts for flavoring

Papaya

Passion fruit

Pea pods

Pickled, preserved or marinated foods, such as olives and pickles, and some snack foods

Raisins

Red plums

Sauerkraut

Seasoned salt

Snow peas

Soy sauce

Other things that may also contribute to migraines include the following:

Strong odors, bright lights or loud noises

Changes in weather or altitude

Being tired, stressed or depressed or the let-down after a stressful event

Changes in sleeping patterns or sleeping time

Missing meals or fasting

Menstrual periods, birth control pills or changing hormone levels (interestingly, stable hormone levels as happens with treating menopause can give migraine relief) “Food allergy” is a term that will make a lot of medical folks groan, we’re trained that these are quite rare and many patients will mistakenly attribute whatever their complaint du jour to be is due to this syndrome. It turns out that food sensitivity is probably a more appropriate term. IgG, immunoglobulins can react with certain foods and trigger migraine, probably through an inflammatory mechanism. If the food can be identified and avoided the headaches can be averted. The trick here is that these sensitivities may not appear for several days after ingestion of the offending food. This makes it very difficult to figure out what the offending foods are. Immunolab based in Pompano FL has the technology to do this analysis.

Another form of prevention that works well involves very high doses of certain vitamins and minerals given by vein, typically done in a physicians office.

Spinal manipulation mainly to the thoracic spine to correct problems there can help prevent and abort migraine as well.

How do folks cope with migraine?

Migraineurs or sufferers also typically seek quiet, cool dark areas and want to lay still and be quiet until it resolves.

Other means of prevention;

Prevention of migraine is another important area to review. Certain triggers are commonly recognized such as chocolate, alcohol, and a variety of foods. Certain things or situations are thought to trigger the migraines, such as menstruation, fatigue, alcohol, certain foods, and often happen on weekends.

Try to stay as active as possible. Develop a physical fitness program for yourself and follow it. Eat a well-balanced diet at regular intervals - do not skip meals. If you smoke, STOP! Avoid over-use of alcohol and do not use any mind or mood altering drugs. Part of the prevention of migraines may involve learning to relax. Set aside time for rest, relaxation, and vacations. Attempt to straighten up any areas of conflict in your life.

Moderate your activities. Work towards balancing the demands on your life. Try to keep a positive outlook and a good attitude towards life. The most important part of treatment is the recognition of triggering symptoms and starting treatment as soon as possible.

Identification of the precipitating factors, and their avoidance, is important in reducing the frequency of headaches. Due to the high frequency (eighty to ninety percent) of food allergy/intolerance in patients with migraine headache, we recommend beginning treatment by identifying and eliminating food allergies. This can be accomplished through blood analysis or by either a pure water fast or the use of an elemental diet *Diet* All food allergens must be eliminated and a four-day rotation diet utilized. Foods that contain vasoactive amines should initially be eliminated; after symptoms have been controlled, such foods can be carefully reintroduced. The primary foods to eliminate are alcoholic beverages, cheese, chocolate, citrus fruits, and shellfish. The diet should be low in sources of arachidonic acid (land-animal fats) and high in foods that inhibit platelet aggregation (vegetable oils, fish oils, garlic, and onion).

5-HTP is at least as effective as other pharmacological agents used in the prevention of migraine headaches and is certainly much safer and better tolerated.

- Low magnesium levels may also play a significant role in many cases of headaches.

- Biofeedback and relaxation training have been judged as effective as the drug approach but are without any side effects.

- Feverfew and ginger extracts can help prevent migraine attacks.

Nutritional Supplements

- Magnesium: 250-400 mg three times per day

- Vitamin B6: 25 mg three times per day

- 5-HTP: 100-200 mg three times per day

Botanical Medicines

- Feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium*): 0.25-0.5 mg parthenolide

- Ginger (*Zingiber officinalis*):

Fresh ginger: approximately 10 g per day (1/4-inch slice)

Dried ginger: 500 mg four times per day

Extract: standardized to contain 20% of gingerol and shogaol, 100-200 mg three times per day for prevention and 200 mg every two hours (up to six times per day) in the treatment of an acute migraine

Physical Medicine

- TENS to control secondary muscle spasm

- Acupuncture to balance meridians

- Biofeedback:

The Association for Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback 10200 West 44th Avenue, Suite 304 Wheat Ridge, CO 80033 303-422-8436

- Guided imagery:

What about prescription medicines?

Treatment;

Therapy for migraine has largely come to include the class of drugs known as triptans which are fairly specific for migraine but unfortunately also quite expensive. The exact mechanism of how they act isn't perfectly understood but we do know that they influence the constriction/dilation of blood vessels in the brain that happen with a migraine attack, they also may have other mechanisms of action that we're not yet familiar with.

Pharmaceutical companies price them high because they are so effective; patients who would formally need to go to the emergency room for IV fluids and medications including narcotics suddenly were able to treat themselves. Prices charged for these drugs have been pretty high with knowledge by the manufacturers that patients will pay the price if the only alternative is an expensive trip to the ER or a lot of misery.

Medicines for migraines include sumatriptan (brand name: Imitrex), zolmitriptan (brand name: Zomig), naratriptan (brand name: Amerge) rizatriptan (brand name: Maxalt), almotriptan (brand name: Axert) and frovatriptan (brand name: Frova).

A medicine called ergotamine (brand name: Ergostat) can be effective alone or combined with other medicines (some brand names: Cafegot, Ercaf, Wigraine). Dihydroergotamine (brand names: Migranal, D.H.E. 45) is related to ergotamine and can be helpful.

Many combinations of medicines (one brand name: Midrin) are also available.

If the pain won't go away, stronger medicine may be needed, such as a narcotic (brand name: Stadol nasal spray) or medicines that contain a barbiturate. These medicines can be habit-forming and should be used cautiously.

Can medicine help prevent migraines?

Yes. Medicine to prevent migraines may be helpful if your headaches happen more than twice a month or if your headaches make it hard for you to work and function. Examples of medicines used to prevent migraines include propranolol (brand name: Inderal), timolol (brand name: Blocadren), divalproex (brand name: Depakote) and some antidepressants.

For more information check out the Links Section @ www.tequestafamilypractice.com
To Your Health!

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