

# Migraine: Complementary/Alternative Medicine

Headache is typically pounding and on one side

Attacks are often preceded by psychological or visual disturbances, accompanied by anorexia, nausea, and gastrointestinal upset, and followed by drowsiness

## QUICK REVIEW

- The first step in treating migraine headache is identifying the precipitating factor.
- Several clinical studies have estimated that approximately seventy percent of patients with chronic daily headaches suffer from drug-induced headaches.
- Many double blind, placebo controlled studies have demonstrated that the detection and removal of allergenic foods will eliminate or greatly reduce migraine symptoms in the majority of patients.
- Foods such as chocolate, cheese, beer, and wine precipitate migraine attacks in many people because they contain histamines and/or other compounds that can trigger migraines in sensitive individuals by causing blood vessels to expand.

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.

## TREATMENT SUMMARY

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 (see FOOD ALLERGY).

### 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).

### 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:  
The Academy for Guided Imagery P.O. Box 2070  
Mill Valley, CA 94942 800-726-2070