

## **MIGRAINE!**

*Are migraine headaches controlling your life and taking away from your sanity, productivity and peace of mind? You may need to look no further than your diet for a solution...*

### ***What is it?***

A migraine is a particular type of headache that occurs as a result of a narrowing of blood vessels supplying the brain and eyes. After a while, the narrowing blood vessels open out causing a rush of blood to the area. It is this rush of blood and sudden surge in pressure that causes the pain.

### ***What are the symptoms?***

There are two types of migraine: common and classic.

The common migraine occurs slowly, producing a throbbing pain that may last for two to seventy two hours. The pain is severe and is often centred at the temple or behind one ear. Or, it can begin at the back of the head and spread to one entire side of the head. It is usually accompanied by nausea, vomiting, blurred vision, and tingling and numbness in the limbs that can last up to 18 hours.

The classic migraine is similar to the common migraine but it is preceded by a set of symptoms referred to as an *aura*, which can include speech disorders, weakness, and disturbances in the senses of vision and/or smell. An aura can also consist of brilliant stars, sparks, flashes, or simple geometric forms passing across the visual field.

### ***What causes it?***

Migraines are a relatively common disorder, affecting more females than males. One factor behind the higher number of females with migraine may be fluctuations in the level of the hormone oestrogen; women typically get migraines around the time of menstruation, when oestrogen levels are low.

Also, migraines often run in families (genetic), and they occur most often in people between the ages of twenty and thirty-five; they tend to decline with age.

Other possible factors involved in migraine include, diet (e.g. cheese, chocolate, coffee, refined sugar), weather (e.g. gloomy, cloudy, rainy days), and orthodox drugs.

In a susceptible individual, there are many things that can trigger a migraine such as, allergies, constipation, stress, liver malfunction, too much or too little sleep, emotional changes, hormonal changes, sun glare, flashing lights, lack of exercise, dental problems, smoking, and low blood sugar.

### ***What should I do?***

*Dietary strategy:*

- Eat a diet low in simple carbohydrates and high in protein
- Eat small meals with nutritious snacks in between to help stabilise wide swings in blood sugar that may precipitate a migraine. Avoid missing meals.
- Eliminate all sources of caffeine, including chocolate, soft drinks, and over-the-counter and prescription medications that contain caffeine.
- Avoid cheese, especially hard cheeses
- Avoid foods that contain the amino acid tyramine, including avocados, bananas, cabbage, canned fish, dairy products, eggplant, hard cheeses, potatoes, tomatoes, wine, and yeast.

- Avoid alcoholic beverages, aspirin, monosodium glutamate (flavour enhancer), nitrites (preservatives found in hot dogs and luncheon meats), and spicy foods.
- Avoid salt and acid-forming foods such as meat, cereal, bread, and grains
- Avoid fried and fatty, greasy foods.
- Identify allergies and avoid any allergenic foods.

*Lifestyle strategy:*

- Get regular moderate exercise
- Do not smoke, and avoid second-hand smoke
- Massage the neck and back of the head daily.
- Incorporate calming and relaxing methods, such as listening to music, meditating, or taking a hot bath.

**Quick Fix**

If you are prone to migraines or headaches in general, try the following:

- ◆ Reduce stress as much as possible as it can trigger migraines or make them worse
- ◆ Try relaxing herbs such as vervain, chamomile, and lavender in teas or in the bath
- ◆ Address muscle strain in the shoulders and neck that can contribute to headaches. Sitting or working awkwardly, hunched over a desk or computer keyboard, can easily lead to headaches
- ◆ Massage the head and neck area with oils containing herbs such as thyme, nutmeg, lavender, or eucalyptus to prevent headaches
- ◆ Identify the cause of migraine, which can be a food intolerance or stress.
- ◆ Avoid common food culprits in migraine such as red wine, chocolate, citrus fruits, coffee and cheese

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