Migraine Headaches

What is a Migraine?
Migraine headaches cause recurrent attacks of intense pain on one side of the head or sometimes both sides of the head. Some symptoms are nausea, vomiting, and sensitivity to light, noise, and smell. The pain can be made worse with movement. Migraines can last several hours, days, or months. Some people have auras which means they could have visual changes like blind spots, flashing lights, arm or facial tingling/numbness, mental sluggishness, or rarely muscle weakness.

Common Triggers include:
- Hormonal fluctuations in females
- Stress
- Bright lights
- Intense noise
- Strong smells (perfumes and paint)
- Weather changes
- Intense physical exertion
- Sleep deprivation
- Withdrawing from excess caffeine
- Pain medications.
- Some prescription medications

Common Food Triggers
- **Caffeine**
  - Coffee
  - Tea
  - Iced tea
  - Cola and
  - Coffee substitutes
  - Red Wine
  - Decaf coffee and tea may contain additional chemical triggers
  - Avoid sodas

  Try caffeine-free herbal tea (without citrus and other trigger flavors)
- **Chocolate**
  - No cocoa of any kind
  - Carob is questionable
  - White chocolate is okay.
- **Monosodium Glutamate (MSG)**
  - Chinese and other restaurant foods
  - Flavored salty snacks
  - Soups
  - Croutons
  - Bouillons
  - Breadcrumbs
  - Seasoned salt
  - Gravies
  - Ready-to-eat meals
Watch out for hidden MSG!

- **Processed Meat and Fish** – Meat or Fish that is aged, canned, cured, fermented, marinated, smoked, tenderized, or preserved with nitrites or nitrates, such as:
  - Hot dogs
  - Sausage
  - Salami
  - Pepperoni
  - Bologna and other lunch meats
  - Liverwurst
  - Beef jerky
  - Certain hams, bacon, pâtés, smoked or pickled fish
  - Caviar
  - Anchovies
  - Also fresh beef and chicken liver and wild game.

- **Cheese and other Dairy Products**
  - The more aged, the worse it is for you
  - Beware of foods with cheese, such as pizza
  - Also, yogurt, including frozen yogurt, sour cream and buttermilk.
  - Good cheeses are ricotta, cream cheese, cottage cheese and good-quality American cheese.

- **Nuts** – Avoid all kinds, as well as nut butters. Seeds are okay.

- **Alcohol and Vinegar**
  - Especially red wine, champagne, and dark or heavy drinks
  - Don’t use too much of condiments such as ketchup, mustard, and mayonnaise, as these are made with vinegar
  - Vodka is best tolerated. Clear (distilled) vinegar is allowed

- **Certain Fruits and Juices** – Citrus fruits such as:
  - Oranges
  - Grapefruits
  - Lemons
  - Limes
  - Tangerines
  - Clementine’s and
  - Pineapples and their juices
  - Bananas
  - Avocado
  - Also avoid raisins and other dried fruits if preserved with sulfites
  - Raspberries
  - Red plums
  - Papayas
  - Passion fruit
  - Figs
  - Dates

- **Certain vegetables, especially onions** - certain beans such:
  - Broad Italian beans
  - Lima
  - Fava
  - Navy
Lentils  
Sauerkraut  
Pea pods  

Good vegetables are leeks, scallions, shallots, spring onions and garlic.

- **Fresh yeast-risen baked goods**
  - Less than one day old
  - Homemade and Restaurant-baked breads
  - Especially sourdough
  - Bagels
  - Doughnuts
  - Pizza dough
  - Soft pretzels
  - Coffee cake

- **Aspartame (NutraSweet)**
  - Saccharin (Sweet n’ Low) may be a trigger for some people.
  - Other artificial sweeteners may be triggers too.

Stevia is not reported to be a problem as of now.

- **Other food items**
  - Possibly soy products, especially if cultured or fermented like tempeh or otherwise highly processed (soy protein isolate/concentrate).
  - Possibly tomatoes and tomato-based sauces and mushrooms.
  - Less risky are unflavored tofu, soy milk and flour. Soy oil is safe as well.

**Tips:**
- Be aware of what food items may give you a headache. However, individual susceptibility varies.
- You can identify your triggers by keeping a headache diary.
- The best way to find out is to avoid everything in the list for about 4 weeks and then reintroduce one at a time, keeping the headache diary.
- Also avoid the dietary triggers, when you have other triggers also, as triggers can be cumulative.

**Supplements which may help:**

**Riboflavin (Vitamin B2)**
- Take (1) 100mg tablet 2 times daily and increase to a total of 400mg every day if tolerated.
- May cause discoloration of urine and mild stomach upset.

**Magnesium**
- Take 400mg daily in two divided doses or as one dose at bedtime.
- The chelated form, glycinate/citrate or combination is better absorbed. You can get this at a health food store.
- Start with half the dose and increase.
- This may cause diarrhea.
• Do not take if you have kidney disease.
• It is safe in pregnancy.

It may take up to 3 months of taking a supplement to see an effect.
• Butter Bur, Fever Few, and Boswellia have been reported to be effective in reducing migraines in some people.
• There is great variation in the make-up of most herbal medicines.
• The safety and drug interactions of these have not been well-studied.
• Ginger capsules may help nausea and headaches.
• Talk with your doctor before taking any of this or other herbal products.

If your headaches are frequent or disabling, in addition to taking medications for the acute attack, you may be advised by your physician to take Preventive medications on a daily basis.

Please make sure that you do not take any pain medicine including over the counter ones more than 2 days a week to avoid rebound headaches. Avoid or cut down the use of any form of caffeine too.

Other Helpful Measures:

Exercise and sleep
• Practice relaxation measures and get adequate sleep.
• If you have problems with sleep, please talk to your physician.
• You should get 20 to 30 minutes of aerobic exercise daily and eat at least 3 meals a day.
• Take 6-8 glasses of water daily.

Isometric Neck Exercises
• Keep your neck stationary. Do not move from center position.
• With an open palm, first press from the front then each side, then from the back.
• Do this for 10 seconds, 5 to 10 times.
• Repeat 3 to 4 times daily.
• See drawing below.
Yoga
- Relaxation practices taught in Yoga can take some time in the beginning.
- But with each try you will become better at relaxing until you will be able to practice yoga almost anywhere without having to lie down.
- Yoga uses deep diaphragmatic breathing, stretching, and meditation to help relieve tension which can decrease headache pain.
- Progressive Relaxation measures and other methods of Meditation are also helpful in reducing stress and improving sleep. Resources are available through internet sources, books, and relaxation tapes. Counseling will be helpful to manage stress.

Resources
“Heal Your Headache – The 1-2-3 Program” by David Buchholz, MD (Workman Publishing)

Kripalu Yoga, A Guide to Practice On and Off the Mat: Richard Faulds and senior teachers of Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health. Good for yoga, and meditation.

You can also search the internet for other resources.

Support Group
National Headache Foundation
- Individual and Professional Memberships
- Monthly Newsletter
- Head Wise Magazine
  American migraine foundation is another good site.

Tracking your Migraine
- You can use a diary to track your headaches and try to identify triggers. Use this diary to track details of your headaches and response to medications.
- You can share this information with your doctor when talking about your condition and treatment

Please see the attached Tracking Tool to Track your Migraines
**Instructions for your Tracking Tool**

**Part 1 Headache Severity**
- Record the strength of your headache pain using a 10 point scale, where 0 equals no pain and 10 equals the worst pain you have experienced.
- Provide scores for different times of the day: morning, afternoon and evening.
- This will help to see how your pain changes.

**Part 2 Headache Duration**
- Record how long your headaches last: less than 4 hours, 4 to 12 hours, or 13 to 24 hours.

**Part 3 Headache Symptoms**
- Record all symptoms that accompany each headache in the order it occurs.

**Part 4 Medication Use**
- Record the name and dose of medication used, if any. This includes all acute and preventive medications, both over-the-counter and prescription, as well as any alternative you use that helps your pain, and the final result/response, and side effects.

**Part 5 Headache Triggers.**
- Record what triggered your headache. This may include a food you ate, bright lights, stress, intense noise, strong smell, weather change, intense physical exertion, lack of sleep, pain medications, withdrawing from excess caffeine, hormonal fluctuations.

You can use your own diary in this format.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date/Time</th>
<th>Headache Severity</th>
<th>Headache Duration</th>
<th>Headache Symptoms</th>
<th>What you did: Medication, Ice, Heat, Sleep, Yoga, etc.</th>
<th>Headache Trigger</th>
<th>Result</th>
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Best Regards,

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