

Hope & Healing

Headache Prevention and Treatment

A heart at peace gives life to the body — Proverbs 14:30

Introduction

About 15 to 20 million Americans suffer from chronic headaches. They spend millions of dollars seeking relief without finding it.

It is useful to classify headache into five types, but in reality most headache comes from two of these five: migraine and tension-type headaches. Migraine is of two kinds, headaches without aura and headaches with aura. The meaning of aura is explained below. The third type is the common tension-type headache. The fourth is cluster headaches and the fifth, organic headaches, or those associated with other health problems.

In this handout we will discuss the treatment and prevention of migraine and tension-type headaches.

Migraine Headache With Aura

An aura is the sudden appearance of a hazy light, a zig-zag pattern of lights or a blind spot in the vision. It may also be numbness or tingling in an arm or leg, weakness of an arm or leg or both or difficulty with speech. Most auras involve the appearance of lights in the vision.

The headache may occur before the aura, with it or after it. This type of migraine is also called classic migraine.

Migraine Headache Without Aura

This type of migraine is also called common migraine. These typically last 4 to 72 hours whether treated successfully or unsuccessfully. Both types of migraine have similar symptoms. This type doesn't have the lights.

The Symptoms of Migraine

Migraine headaches are "sick headaches." Patients are frequently nauseated. Vomiting and diarrhea may follow. The headache is on one side of the head only about 60% of the time, and 20% of the time, it is always on the same side of the head. The same patient may experience migraine with aura, migraine without aura, or aura alone.

Migraine may cause depression, mood changes, irritability, or jitteriness. Sometimes certain food is wanted. At other times the appetite is lost. Typically the migraine sufferer wants to lie down in a dark, quiet room. In fact, loud noises and bright lights aggravate the migraine. Sleep often brings relief and activity makes it worse.

Women have migraine twice as often as men and it is common during the menstrual period. Oral contraceptives may make migraine worse. About 90% of patients with migraine have a history of it in their family.

Tension-Type Headaches

These are the common stress type headaches. They usually have the following features:

- The pain is on both sides of the head.
- The pain is like a tight band but it doesn't pound like migraine.
- The headaches are mild to moderate in severity. They may not allow a full work schedule but they don't usually cause you to stop work.
- Physical activity doesn't aggravate the headache.

The tension-type headache may last from 30 minutes to 7 days. There is a

longer type that occurs on an average 15 days of every month.

Tension-type headaches and migraine headache may overlap and the same person can have both. A headache can begin as a tension-type and develop into a migraine headache.

Preventing Migraine Headaches Through Avoiding Certain Foods

Tyramine is a chemical that occurs naturally in many foods. Other chemical compounds that are thought to trigger migraine attacks are sodium nitrate, sodium nitrite, and monosodium glutamate, or MSG. About 35% of migraine sufferers will prevent some of their headaches if they avoid the following foods.

- Aged Cheese
- Alcohol
- Avocado
- Bacon
- Bananas
- Herring
- Canned figs
- Hot dogs
- Chocolate
- Yogurt
- Nuts
- Onions
- Pods of broad beans
- Tea
- Chinese food or any food with large

amounts of monosodium glutamate (MSG).

- Citrus fruits and juices (orange, lemon, lime, grapefruit).
- Coffee, including decaffeinated coffee.
- Fermented sausage (bologna, salami, pepperoni, summer sausage).

All cheese is aged except cottage cheese, cream cheese, and American processed cheese.

The juices you may use are apple, cranberry, cranapple, grape, pineapple, tomato, and V8.

You may substitute Postum for coffee or tea. Since we do not know the chemical structure of various herb teas, these should not be used.

Non-Drug Treatment of Headache

Patients who experience chronic headaches should initiate a total wellness program:

- Regular exercise.
- Sound nutrition.
- Alcohol — none at all or no more than 2 drinks a day.
- Stress relief through relaxation techniques and organization of affairs.

Although not scientifically established, several non-drug measures have been reported to be of value:

1. Hot or cold pads placed around the neck or head. Putting the hands in hot water for migraine relief (not hot enough to burn). Putting the head under a cold shower.
2. Massage of tense forehead muscles and tight neck and shoulder muscles.
3. Relaxation techniques, meditation, yoga, and biofeedback can help.

Drug Therapy for Headache _____

Treatment always begins with an accurate diagnosis. Many headache sufferers fear that they have a brain tumor. Brain tumors, actually, are quite

rare, causing less than one half of one percent of headaches.

Drug therapy of headaches will either be preventive treatment or acute treatment.

Preventive Treatment _____

These are daily medications designed to prevent headache attacks in patients who are unable to cope with their headaches. These drugs fall into 5 categories:

- Beta blockers.
- Antidepressants.
- Calcium channel blockers.
- Serotonin antagonists.
- Anticonvulsants. Your doctor should decide if one of these might help.

Acute Therapy _____

The goal of acute therapy is to take a medication soon after the headache starts, to prevent its becoming severe.

An ergotamine containing drug given by injection or suppository will sometimes stop migraine attacks. Other front-line drugs are aspirin, acetaminophen, and ibuprofen. All drugs that are used to treat headache should be used for only two to three days in a row. Imitrex, and similar drugs are now available to stop acute migraine attacks.

Summary _____

The key to successful relief of chronic headaches is to understand the cause, and understand the treatments. Do what you can to avoid being headachy all the time. Get the help you need to keep headaches under control.

Successful therapy of migraine involves trying a remedy or a combination of remedies until the right combination is found.

Awaken the Miracles Within You

The Miracle of Action

Our bodies are a miracle of creation. Think about it. The coordination of the mind, the nerves and the muscles to allow a runner to cover a mile in less than a minute is an indication of the balance that nature demands.

Nature also requires a minimum of exercise for everyone; it is a universal need. The payback of exercise is high: it protects against heart disease. It helps us develop a positive mental attitude. It keeps our weight under control. It keeps our bodies flexible. Note: Such a miracle should be received with joy and protected for its value.

Don't squander the promise of a healthy body. Enjoy exercise. Do it with enthusiasm. Don't allow yourself to be bored.

Make a plan and stay with it for 100 days, until it becomes one of your habits.

Remember, nothing happens until something moves.

The recommendations and information in this handout are appropriate in most cases. However, for specific information concerning your personal medical condition,